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THE BRONTËS
FACT AND FICTION

THE BRONTËS

FACT AND FICTION

By ANGUS M. MacKAY, B.A.

LONDON: SERVICE & PATON
5 HENRIETTA STREET 1897

21425.30

HARVARD COLLEGE
JUL 23 1897
LIBRARY.
Mary Osgood fund.

Printed by BALLANTYNE, HANSON & Co
At the Ballantyne Press

PREFACE

THE nucleus of the longer essay in this little volume is an article in the *Westminster Review* of October 1895, which is now out of print. I enlarge it and republish it at the solicitation of some of those who read it in its original form, and with the desire to set at rest a vexed question of Brontë bibliography. An attempt to apply the methods of the "higher criticism" to a modern book is novel and may prove not uninteresting.

Let me hasten to say that I make no charge of dishonesty against Dr. William Wright. I concern myself with the credi-

bility of the book, not with the motives or character of its author. In the seventeenth century, long before the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics was discovered, Kircher professed to give translations of Egyptian stelæ; he was enthusiastic, he was honest, he had spent years in studying the subject, nothing could be laid to his charge except, perhaps, a little unconscious self-deception—and yet his translations bore not the slightest resemblance to the true meaning of the originals. So Dr. Wright has, I am informed, been diligent in inquiry, and I do not accuse him of bad faith; but I am convinced that his volume is unreliable almost from cover to cover.

It may, perhaps, be thought that the matter is here dealt with in too great detail. It may be asked, Why break a fly

upon the wheel? But it must be remembered that Dr. Wright's book has passed through several editions, it was received with a chorus of approval by the critics, and its narratives have been widely accepted as history: only a very thorough exposure of its unreliability can extirpate the errors which it has sown broadcast. But I have no doubt that the facts set forth in the following pages will carry complete conviction with them, and that those who possess *The Brontës in Ireland* will henceforth merely treasure it for what it is—one of the curiosities of nineteenth-century literature.

The other essay in this little book—which is here printed first—deals mainly with the secret tragedy in Charlotte Brontë's life which had so remarkable

an effect in quickening and directing her genius. Circumstances have made it necessary to treat the matter now with perfect frankness, but I trust I have said nothing which is not compatible with entire reverence for one of the noblest and most gifted of women.

ANGUS M. MacKAY.

ABERDEEN, *April* 1897.

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FRESH LIGHT ON BRONTË BIOGRAPHY

FRESH LIGHT ON BRONTË BIOGRAPHY

THE recent publication of Mr. Shorter's admirable work, *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, has quickened the interest which is everywhere felt in Brontë biography. Mr. Shorter has very skilfully grouped the copious material placed at his disposal, and we are now in possession of all the facts which are ever likely to be known concerning the wonderful Haworth family. It must not be supposed, however, that the mystery and glamour are now dispelled, and that henceforth we are to see Charlotte, Emily and Anne only in the light of common day. The doings and sufferings of the shy, depressed, awkward girls at the bare

parsonage or in the fashionable Pensionnat will continue to have a strange attraction for all students of literary genius. It still remains true that never before was a drama so fascinating constructed out of such homely material or acted upon so narrow a stage, but about the characters of the actors there is henceforth little room for dubiety. It may be well to summarise the impressions which result from a study of the abundant material now at our disposal.

The Brontë Family Group.

The character of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, the father of the novelist, has been alternately blackened and whitewashed since Mrs. Gaskell's *Life* appeared, but these accretions are now removed, and the original figure stands revealed. Indeed one cannot but wonder at the skill with which Mrs. Gaskell, without any violation

of good taste, was able to suggest the blemishes no less than the excellences of old Mr. Brontë, writing as she did during his lifetime and at his request. The Vicar of Haworth was eccentric, self-willed, somewhat vain; he was grandiose in speech and tyrannous in bearing when his will was crossed. Once at least, as we are now permitted to know, he took to excessive whisky-drinking. Mr. Shorter amiably tries to soften these unpleasant traits, but the facts are too strong for him. When the Rev. A. B. Nicholls had the presumption to propose to Charlotte Brontë it is thus the daughter describes the effect of the news upon her father:

"Papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with: the veins on his temples started up like whipcord and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot. I made haste to promise that Mr. Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal."

Alluding to this episode, Mr. Shorter

writes: "For once, and for the only time in his life there is reason to believe, his passions were thoroughly aroused." But this will not do. Charlotte's words in writing to Miss Nussey are: "I only wish you were here to see papa in his present mood: *you would know something of him;*" and she goes on to speak of his relentless cruelty to Mr. Nicholls. Her language is capable of but one construction—the outburst was not exceptional, it was characteristic. The story that in a gust of passion he cut to pieces his wife's silk gown has been contradicted; but if it is not true we must at least think it well invented. And yet, while old Mr. Brontë was far from immaculate, there is another side of his character which inspires respect. He was the reverse of commonplace, was proud in the nobler sense of the word, possessed an indomitable will, and had abilities decidedly above the average. The fact that the Rev. Patrick Brontë, A.B., began

life as Patrick Prunty, the bare-footed peasant, and owed his success entirely to his own exertions, speaks for itself. Some of his daughter's biographers, indeed, describe him as meanly ignoring his Irish relations. This we now know is quite untrue. He was in correspondence with his Irish relatives till his death; he visited them and they him; he mentioned them in his will; and, straitened as were his own circumstances, he never failed to contribute most generously to his mother's support so long as she lived. When every fault has been admitted, we can all give in our adhesion to Mr. Shorter's verdict on him as "a thoroughly upright and honourable man, who came manfully through a somewhat severe life-battle."

Patrick Branwell Brontë does not come out so well under the fiercer light which now beats upon the family group. Unless want of balance is to be considered as

synonymous with genius, it is impossible to credit him with unusual mental talents. With his letters before us we cannot but perceive that he was intellectually commonplace. As to his moral character, the less said the better. A small incident may sometimes serve as an index to wide tracts of a man's disposition; and any one who reads the mean and sly letter to Hartley Coleridge which appears on p. 126 of Mr. Shorter's book will think Branwell capable of the worst which has been imputed to him.

As for the gentle Anne, she remains—well, just the gentle Anne—pious, patient and trustful. Her talent was of that evangelical, pietistic type which never lacks a certain gracefulness and never rises above a certain intellectual level. Had she lived in our day her novels would have attracted little attention, and her poetry would hardly have found ad-

mission into any first-class magazine. It remains clear as ever that her immortality is due to her sisters. Upon those bright twin-stars many telescopes are turned, and then there swims into the beholder's view this third, mild-shining star of the tenth magnitude, which otherwise would have remained invisible. It follows that Anne will always have a place assigned her in the chart of the literary heavens. Nothing, however, is ever likely to occur either to heighten our estimate of her literary ability or to lessen the affection which her character inspires.

The author of *Wuthering Heights* still remains, what she has ever been, the sphynx of literature. Mr. Shorter prints a curious document, written by Emily in her twenty-seventh year, which shows how the child-spirit survived in her, as it is apt to do in men and women of genius, but it sheds no farther light upon its writer's

personality. The mystery enshrouding her is, indeed, partially accounted for when we learn how almost absolutely impenetrable was the reserve in which this lonely soul clothed herself—a reserve so great that it seems positively to have revolted some of Charlotte's Brussels friends. But to account for the presence of a mystery is not to explain the mystery itself, and we know now more clearly than ever that Emily was one of those self-centred natures which "will not abide our question." As her genius was "rare" in the felicitous sense in which that word is applied to Ben Jonson in the famous epitaph, so her personality was unique. It might be said of her, almost more truly than of Milton:

"Her soul was like a star, and dwelt apart."

Her genius may be compared to a mountain peak, whose bold contour compels attention yet forbids approach; bare, steep, affording no foothold to the explorer, and shrouding

its summit in clouds which shift but do not lift; a Matterhorn which no Whymper has yet appeared to scale. To this proud isolation of spirit is partly due the strong originality which places her in a rank above her sister, and explains why those who have appreciated her—from Sydney Dobell to Mr. Swinburne—have been fit, if few.

But it need hardly be said that the great bulk of the new material in Mr. Shorter's book relates to Charlotte. We can hardly say that it alters the figure now so familiar to us, but it brings it into clearer light, and confirms our former estimate of the great novelist's genius and character. We now know that Lockhart, the editor of the *Quarterly*, some months before the criticism appeared in his review which gave Charlotte such pain, wrote thus of the author of *Jane Eyre*:

"I think her far the cleverest that has written since Austen and Edgeworth were

in their prime, worth fifty Trollopes and Martineaus rolled into one counterpane, with fifty Dickenses and Bulwers to keep them company."

It is a surprising estimate considering the time and the man, but when truer canons of criticism prevail, and our guides in literature learn to discriminate between the natural and the artificial, between creation and caricature—which at best is only humorous *imitation*—it will not be found one whit too high. Certainly the letters of Charlotte Brontë, now made public for the first time, increase our respect for her intellectual ability; nor do they lower our previous admiration for her character; more than ever are we ready to unite with Thackeray in doing homage to "the burning love of truth, the bravery, the simplicity, the indignation at wrong, the eager sympathy, the pious love and reverence, the passionate honour, so to speak, of the woman." The publication of Mr.

Shorter's work will certainly tend to the firmer establishment of Charlotte Brontë's fame.

With the inferences which the author draws from his copious material, however, it is not always possible to agree. Sometimes, indeed, these appear directly contrary to the evidence on which they are ostensibly based. While the instances of this are not numerous enough to weaken our gratitude to Mr. Shorter they are important enough to call for instant challenge, and I purpose now to discuss two of the subjects on which he has, as I think, arrived at wrong conclusions. One of the questions thus raised I shall touch with extreme reluctance—I allude to the relations between M. Héger and his gifted pupil; but I feel that it would be hurtful to Charlotte's reputation to deal with it any longer only by hint and innuendo. The other question, which I shall treat first, is

that of the religious opinions of Charlotte Brontë, which need not detain us long.

The Religious Views of the Novelists.

The theological position of a person of genius is always a matter of great interest, as that is, naturally, an index to much else. Mr. Shorter speaks of Charlotte's ultra-Protestant education, of her "inheritance of intolerance," of her sharing the views of her sister Anne, and he leaves us with the impression that she was a strict Tory touched with Orangeism. As to her political views I shall not here concern myself beyond saying that I think Mr. Shorter confuses the girl's childlike enthusiasm for the "Great Duke" with the opinions of the mature woman. But when we are bidden to judge of the religion of the daughters from the opinions of their

father, it is needful to remember that persons of strong intellect are apt to vindicate their right to freedom of thought by adopting some other opinions than those offered by their environment,—Maurice began life as a Unitarian, and Newman as an Evangelical. In any case there is no room for doubt as to the views of the Brontë sisters. Anne kept most nearly to the doctrine they had all been taught, but even she departed from it in one particular, for in her poem, "A Word to the 'Elect'," she expresses a disbelief in the dogma of eternal punishment. Emily's views are not easily defined. The only fact that has come down to us is that she expressed approval of a friend who had refused to state what her religious opinions were. Her writings enable us to be certain of only one thing—that she was far removed from orthodoxy, and that what faith she retained she held, not with the help of, but in spite of, religious formulæ.

"Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts . . . .
To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by Thine infinity."

But about Charlotte's position after her opinions had matured there surely can be no dispute—it was midway between those of her two sisters. Her views were not stereotyped, nor were they utterly formless. Her outspoken condemnation of some of the fruits of Roman Catholicism, as witnessed in the Pensionnat at Brussels, has been set down to her supposed Orange sympathies; but it was quite compatible with detachment of mind: the girl who herself took refuge in the Confessional in her loneliness and distress, and who made a devoted Roman Catholic the hero of her greatest work, was not a person blinded by prejudices. Her attitude towards religious questions was never other than tolerant, but she was always outspoken where she saw, or thought she saw,

what was blameworthy. She loved the Church of England, but she knew its faults and denounced them: "God preserve it! God also reform it," she says in *Shirley*. Her verdict on its inferior clergy is well known: "They seem to me a self-seeking, vain, empty race." She hated with all her heart that narrow ecclesiasticism which seems to have been common in her day as it is in ours. She was generally painfully shy in company, but on one occasion, when the three famous curates "began glorifying themselves and abusing the Dissenters," she surprised herself and the company by some sharp sentences which struck all dumb. In her correspondence with W. S. Williams we get many interesting glimpses of her opinions on religious matters. When Mr. Williams had made a confession to her which he feared might displease her she wrote back: "I smile at you for supposing . . . . that I could blame you for not being able,

when you look among sects and creeds, to discover any one that you can exclusively and implicitly adopt as yours. I perceive myself that some light falls on earth from heaven, that some rays from the shrine of truth pierce the darkness of this life and world, but they are few, and faint, and scattered." When the same correspondent speaks of his views as resembling those of Emerson she writes back: "You are already aware that in much of what you say my opinion coincides with those you express." But she urges: "Ignorance, weakness, or indiscretion must have their props—they cannot walk alone. Let them hold by what is purest in doctrine and simplest in ritual; *something* they *must* have." She calls the Athanasian Creed "profane," and when she expresses her attachment to the Church of England she explains that she draws the line at this formulary. Her favourite divines are Arnold and Maurice. For the former

she expresses an unbounded veneration: "Were there but ten such men among the hierarchs of the Church of England . . . . her sanctuaries would be purified, her rites reformed, her withered veins would swell again with vital sap; but it is not so." So again in another letter: "A hundred such men—fifty—nay ten or five such righteous men might save any country; might victoriously champion any cause." Maurice she heard preach when in London, and she was deeply impressed. "Had I the choice," she wrote, "it is Maurice whose ministry I should frequent." Miss Mary A. Robinson, in her book on Emily Brontë, says of her heroine that she concealed her opinions by the term "Broad Church," and "called herself a disciple of the tolerant and thoughtful Maurice." There is plainly no evidence of this, and it is quite possible that a description of Charlotte has been mistakenly applied to Emily. In any case it is clear, from the

passages I have quoted from Charlotte's letters—and they might be reinforced by passages from her novels—that "Broad Church" is the only title which can describe her opinions. Had she been living in our day her favourite divines would have been Page-Roberts and Phillips Brooks; her attitude resembled that of Tennyson and Browning and of most men of genius who have remained definitely Christian. To describe her as infected with an Orange taint and professing a narrow Evangelicism is seriously to misrepresent her.

Charlotte Brontë's Secret.

I now proceed to deal with the other question upon which, as I think, Mr. Shorter has come to a wrong conclusion. It is as follows: *What was the nature of Charlotte Brontë's feeling towards*

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M. Héger, her Brussels teacher, and what effect had this upon her after-life? Let me state at the outset that I think this subject should never have been publicly touched upon. I do not say this because I sympathise with the illogical demand which has been made of late years that portraits of public men should have all the shadows left out. A biography which presents only what is good in the career of its subject, and suppresses the rest, propagates falsehood. Charlotte Brontë, who was the very soul of truth, would undoubtedly have wished to be presented to posterity as she really was, and not as an ideal figure. But the episode to which I am about to refer was a secret which she kept hidden from her dearest friends in her lifetime. It does not, as I shall attempt to show, affect, though it confirms, our estimate of her character, and the knowledge of it is not necessary to the appreciation of her art. It should have been left alone.

But recent biographers of the Brontës have so used their discretion as to make any further reserve harmful. Sir Wemyss Reid, in his *Monograph*, was the first to lift the curtain which concealed the tragedy of Charlotte Brontë's life; he described her as leaving Brussels disillusioned, after having "tasted strange joys and drunk deep of waters the very bitterness of which seemed to endear them to her." Mr. Augustine Birrell, in his *Life*, published ten years later, while protesting that "it is not admirable to seek to wrest the secrets of a woman's heart from the works of her genius," tells his readers they will find all they want in *Villette*, and will carry away from it "what they cannot doubt to be true information,"—in fact, while professing anxiety to cover up the secret, he makes it known to all the world. Other writers have referred to the episode with the same affectation of mystery, and Miss Frederika Macdonald has more recently given, on

the authority of some Brussels friends, details which would, if true, have been little to the credit of Charlotte Bronte.* Luckily Mr. Shorter is able absolutely to dispose of these latter allegations, and for this we are grateful. I am apprehensive, however, that his own treatment of the Brussels episode may have an effect which he himself would be the first to regret. Mr. Shorter assures us that there was no tragedy, and he speaks of the allegation that there was as "a silly and offensive imputation." His position may be summarised thus: *The story is not true, but if it were true it would be discreditable.* All admirers of Charlotte Brontë then wait anxiously for a disproof which shall be final. But they do not get it: on the contrary, the facts which Mr. Shorter has to tell strengthen previous surmises, and henceforth more than ever those who study Brontë literature will be of the opinion of

* *The Woman at Home*, July 1894.

Sir Wemyss Reid and Mr. Birrell. Must we, then, suppose Charlotte guilty of discreditable conduct such as will depose her from the high pedestal on which she has been hitherto placed? Such a supposition is only rendered possible by the mysterious way in which the subject has hitherto been treated. I should have infinitely preferred, as I have said, that the story should have been left in complete obscurity, but the treatment by dark hints and significant nods is more dangerous than frank discussion. I propose, therefore, to join issue with Mr. Shorter, and to maintain, *The story is probably true, but if true it is not discreditable.* When this part of Charlotte Brontë's history is disclosed we shall pity her more, but I trust we shall not love or esteem her less.

Let me now state the evidence relating to the Brussels episode as it presents itself to the close student of Brontë literature. In doing so I shall first touch upon certain

phenomena in Charlotte's writings which have always seemed to suggest some secret love tragedy in her life.

There is a peculiarity in Charlotte Brontë's novels which differentiates them from all other writings of their class—I refer to the fact that love in them is treated, not from the man's, but from the woman's point of view. This was almost a new element in literature. In previous love-tales, even when women were the authors, it was the man who longed, who suffered, who was left in suspense, and a veil remained over the heart of the heroine until shyly half-lifted in the closing scenes. Charlotte Brontë's bolder method revealed to us a hemisphere previously almost unknown, or at least not mapped out. Turn to *Shirley*, and it is not the hero, but Caroline Helstone, who loves and suffers, and whose fluctuating hopes and fears make the interest of the story. This new

departure constituted a "return to nature" as real as that accomplished by Wordsworth in the domain of poetry. It attracted attention from the first. It was this which made those critics who confused the conventional with the moral describe *Jane Eyre* and *Villette* as "coarse." It was this which led Miss Martineau to dwell on Charlotte's "incessant tendency to describe the need of being loved," and to complain in her review of *Villette*, "All the female characters, in all their thoughts and lives, are full of one thing, or are regarded by the reader in the light of that one thought—love. It begins with the child of six years old at the opening, and it closes with it at the last page." In reality, however, it is this very originality of treatment, combined with the knowledge of the deep things of the heart which it displays, which constitutes the value of this writer's work. It is this which gives her the supremacy over the other novelists of her

sex. Miss Ferrier and Miss Austen were artists as skilful in the use of the brush as Charlotte Brontë; indeed the former surpasses her in humour, and the latter in delicacy of touch. But both these authors dealt with subjects which, in comparison with hers, were trivial: they painted the surface of life; she probed its depths. Even George Eliot, incomparably superior as she is in breadth of treatment and variety of subject, has not shown us the recesses of the human heart as has the author of *Villette* and *Shirley*. Charlotte Brontë herself was quite conscious wherein lay the strength of her genius; she realised that a writer's ability to deal with the deepest passions of human nature is the true criterion of the greatness of his art. It was on this ground she challenged Miss Austen's right to that supreme position which George Henry Lewes claimed for her. Her criticism is well worth recalling and well worth pondering:

"Jane Austen ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. Even to the feelings she vouchsafes no more than an occasional graceful but distant recognition; too frequent converse with them would ruffle the smooth elegance of her progress. Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores. She no more with her mind's eye beholds the heart of her race than each man, with bodily vision, sees the heart in his heaving breast. . . . If this is heresy I cannot help it."

Charlotte Brontë's own art was the anti-

thesis of that of Jane Austen. It was hers to depict love in its deeper, more tragic, more serious moods and aspects. She could give us the ordinary "love scene," and charm us with a spell such as few others can command—witness the passage in *The Professor*, in which Crimsworth claims Frances Henri—but it is the love agony which is her element. The pain of unrequited affection is the feeling she never tires of depicting, and in describing this she has no equal. Her novels may end happily, but not till they have been made the medium of exhibiting the suffering which the master passion brings with it when unaccompanied by hope. Nowhere else are to be found such piercing cries of lonely anguish as may be heard in *Shirley* and *Villette*. They are the very *de profundis* of love sunk in the abyss of despair. And their author insists throughout how much greater this suffering must be for women than for men, both because they

are doomed to bear in silence, and because they have not the distraction of an active career. There is a passage in *Shirley* which may be taken as the text upon which most of the novels were written:

"A lover feminine can say nothing; if she did the result would be shame and anguish, inward remorse for self-treachery. Nature would brand such demonstration as a rebellion against her instincts, and would vindictively repay it afterwards by the thunderbolt of self-contempt smiting suddenly in secret. . . . You expected bread, and you have got a stone; break your teeth on it, and don't shriek because the nerves are martyrised. Do not doubt that your mental stomach—if you have such a thing—is strong as an ostrich's; the stone will digest. You held out your hand for an egg, and fate put into it a scorpion. Show no consternation; close your fingers firmly upon the gift; let it sting through your palm. Never mind:

in time, after your hand and arm have swelled and quivered long with torture, the squeezed scorpion will die, and you will have learnt the great lesson how to endure without a sob. In the whole remnant of your life, if you survive the test—some, it is said, die under it—you will be stronger, wiser, less sensitive."

Now, on finding Charlotte Brontë so perfect a mistress of all the moods of love as it affects women, and especially of the more tragic aspects of it, one cannot but ask, How did she obtain this knowledge? Is she writing merely from observation or from personal feeling? Luckily, we can give the answer in her own words. "Details, situations which I do not understand and cannot personally inspect, I would not for the world meddle with. . . . *Besides, not one feeling on any subject, public or private, will I ever affect that I do not really experience.*" But this assurance is not necessary to those who have lovingly

studied her works. The light that is in them is not pale reflected light; the burning rays come direct from the source in which they were kindled. Personal feeling vibrates in every line of Charlotte's writing. That her novels are the outcome of personal experience is, to those who know her best, a self-evident truth.

We turn, then, to the numerous lives of Charlotte Brontë to see where and when were learnt those bitter lessons which her writings teach. We knew her well before Mr. Shorter's book appeared; and now she is perhaps more minutely known to us than any other person of literary genius, save perhaps Samuel Johnson—and even this is a doubtful exception, for our knowledge of Johnson is confined to his table-talk and his outward characteristics, he never bared his heart to us as Charlotte does in her novels. We can now trace step by step every mile of her life's

journey; we know all her friends; we can peruse her copious correspondence; we can identify almost every character in her novels, even the most subordinate. And when we examine all this information, this truth is forced upon us: that *the characteristic experiences recorded in her books were not gained at Haworth: there is no room for any love tragedy there.* The only gentlemen she met there were the neighbouring curates; through her correspondence we now know them all, and what she thought of them, and her remarks are frank but the reverse of complimentary. The way to Charlotte's heart, we may be sure, lay through her intellect and imagination, and the curates, as she describes them, are not the men to have captivated her. Plain though she was she seems to have exercised a peculiar fascination over some natures. She had four offers of marriage in all—two before she became famous and two after; and if we glance at

the way in which she dealt with them, we shall learn that she certainly was not easily susceptible of love.

Her first suitor was the Rev. Henry Nussey, a brother of her life-long friend. Her reply was of a very business-like character, explaining that "delay was wholly unnecessary," returning "a decided negative," and giving him a description of the kind of wife he *ought* to choose.

The next aspirant was the Rev. Mr. Price, a young Irish clergyman fresh from Dublin University, who proposed to her after having spent only one afternoon and evening in her company. On this adventure she writes to her friend Miss Nussey: "Well, thought I, I have heard of love at first sight, but this beats all; I leave you to guess what my answer would be, convinced that you will not do me the injustice of guessing wrong. When we meet I'll show you the letter. I hope you are laughing heartily."

This was in the year 1839. Nearly ten years elapsed before another offer came, and meanwhile the Brussels episode had taken place.

The third suitor was a Mr. James Taylor, a literary gentleman connected with Messrs. Smith and Elder. He was in every way a man to be respected, and was most persevering in his endeavours to attain his end. But, like most persons who are liable to fall into the grasp of a tyrannous affection, Charlotte was capable also of strong antipathies. She writes: "Friendship, gratitude, esteem I have; but each moment that he came near me, and that I could see his eyes fastened upon me, my veins ran ice. Now that he is away I feel far more gently towards him; it is only close by that I grow rigid —stiffening with a strange mixture of apprehension and anger, which nothing softens but his retreat and a perfect subduing of his manner." She respected and pitied

him, but she was firm in insisting that as she did not love him she could not marry him.

The story of the wooing of the Rev. A. B. Nicholls, three years later, is as interesting as anything in the novels. When the first offer came Charlotte felt that she could not marry him, and yet the manner in which he pleaded his suit evidently impressed her: "Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection when he doubts response." She refused him, and her father, as we have seen, treated his pretensions to his daughter's hand with disdain. Time passed on, and the sufferings which the rejected lover endured were such as could not fail to touch Charlotte's pity. We read of his breaking down while administering the Communion to Charlotte in Haworth Church: "He

struggled, faltered, then lost command over himself, stood before my eyes, and in the sight of all the communicants, white, shaking, voiceless." The women sobbed audibly and tears came to Charlotte's eyes. Another touching scene took place when he called to take his final leave of Mr. Brontë: "Perceiving that he stayed long before going out of the gate, and, remembering his long grief, I took courage and went out, trembling and miserable. I found him leaning against the garden door in a paroxysm of anguish, sobbing as women never sob. Of course I went straight to him. Very few words were exchanged, those few barely articulate." A passion mighty as this was bound to make an impression sooner or later upon a heart so compassionate as Charlotte's, and we are not surprised to find her writing to her confidante: "Dear Nell, without loving him I don't like to think of him suffering in solitude, and

wish him anywhere, so that he were happy." Pity is proverbially akin to love, and within eighteen months from the first proposal a happy marriage was consummated. But to the last she had no illusion as to the nature of her own feelings. Only a few weeks before the wedding she wrote: "I am still very calm, very inexpectant. What I taste of happiness is of the soberest order. I trust to love my husband. I am grateful for his tender love to me. I believe him to be an affectionate, a conscientious, a high-principled man; and if, with all this, I should yield to regrets that fine talents, congenial tastes and thoughts are not added, it seems to me I should be most presumptuous and thankless."

After marriage she writes in the same sober strain. Mr. Nicholls indeed is entitled to the gratitude of all who appreciate the genius of Charlotte Brontë. He brought the first taste of unalloyed happiness into her life. He taught her the sweet and

tranquil pleasures of an affection which is almost more precious than love. But it is plain that the over-mastering passion depicted in the novels had no place in her relations with him. The flame, it would seem, had already passed on her, and left behind nothing that was inflammable. No chapter in her life at Haworth, before the Brussels episode, can account for the phenomena of the novels, and all that took place there afterwards showed that the experiences upon which the novels were founded were already things of the past.

To Brussels, then, perforce, we are driven if we are to continue our quest. Every one knows how Charlotte and Emily, aged twenty-six and twenty-four respectively, went to the Pensionnat Héger in the Rue d'Isabelle to learn French and attain other accomplishments. At the head of this establishment was Madame Héger, but

literature was taught by her husband, the Paul Emanuel of *Villette*. Any one who wishes to know his general characteristics has only to turn to the famous novel, where he is painted with an effect more lifelike than that of any photograph. Two points only need to be emphasised. The first is his great intellectual ability. All accounts agree that, though he wrote no book, his literary attainments were remarkable, and his capacity for awakening enthusiasm for what is great in literature amounted to genius. His critical insight is evidenced by the fact that at his interview with Mrs. Gaskell, at a time when Emily was unknown, and the fame of Charlotte was spreading widely in Europe, he gave the palm of genius to the younger sister, and sketched her characteristics in language as terse as it was true. The other point to be noted is that he was a man of deeply religious character. Mrs. Gaskell speaks of him as "a kindly, wise, good and religious

man;" and a lady in Brussels thus described him some ten years after the Brontës had left Brussels:

"Je ne connais pas personnellement M. Héger, mais je sais qu'il est peu de caractères aussi nobles, aussi admirables que le sien. Il est un des membres les plus zélés de cette Société de S. Vincent de Paul dont je l'ai déjà parlé, et ne se contente pas de servir les pauvres et les malades, mais leur consacre encore les soirées. Après des journées absorbées tout entières par les devoirs que sa place lui impose, il réunit les pauvres, les ouvriers, leur donne des cours gratuits, et trouve encore le moyen de les amuser en les instruisant. Ce dévouement te dira assez que M. Héger est profondément et ouvertement religieux."

This was the man who first gave Charlotte that intellectual sympathy for which she must have been craving all her life; who, day after day, sat by her side or bent

over her shoulder, correcting her mistakes, reproving her faults, and acting towards her as Paul Emanuel acted towards Lucy Snowe or Crimsworth towards Frances Henri. He did not, however, share the warm feelings with which, in fiction, these two gentlemen regarded their pupils. He was interested, no doubt, in Charlotte's intellectual freshness, and he pitied her obvious forlornness. Miss Frederika Macdonald, who was his pupil many years later, writes: "He was a man of an extraordinarily tender heart as well as a powerful mind, whose most terrible moods—and his moods were sometimes terrible—would suddenly melt and soften at the spectacle of any token of genuine distress." We may be sure that the loneliness of the friendless girls would appeal very strongly to him. He admired, too, Charlotte's character, and spoke in warm terms to Mrs. Gaskell of her unselfishness. But nothing is more certain than that M. Héger had no feeling

towards his plain awkward pupil which he was not willing for the whole world to see.

When the Brontë girls had been at Brussels nine months their aunt died, and they hurried back to Haworth Vicarage. Emily then elected to stay at home and keep house for her father, but Charlotte returned to Brussels. She herself thus comments upon this decision in a letter to Miss Nussey:

"I returned to Brussels after aunt's death against my conscience, prompted by what then seemed an irresistible impulse. I was punished for my selfish folly by a total withdrawal for more than two years of happiness and peace of mind."

Mr. Shorter endeavours to account for this confession by saying that old Mr. Brontë took to excessive whisky-drinking at this time under the influence of a curate of convivial tastes, and that Charlotte felt she should have stayed to protect him: he fails to see that this leaves the

really suggestive phrases in this passage unexplained. Granted that anxiety for her father caused a part, or even the whole, of the uneasiness of conscience of which Charlotte speaks, the question remains, what was that "irresistible impulse" which impelled so dutiful a daughter to act thus? And how are we to account for the last half of the statement? Mr. Shorter admits that the daughter's return speedily rescued the father from his evil habit, and she only stayed in Brussels one year. Yet Charlotte, who was accustomed to weigh her words, states that *for two years she suffered a total withdrawal of happiness and peace of mind.* Whatever it may have been, *something* must have happened at Brussels to account for this melancholy result.

Charlotte's second stay at the Pensionnat was less happy than the first had been. Emily was no longer with her, and her friend Mary Taylor had left the city. She was now more lonely than ever, had

a deeper craving for sympathy, and was more grateful for every word and look of kindness. Meanwhile she was brought into still closer relationship with M. Héger, for she not only received from him lessons in literature but she instructed him and his brother-in-law in English. At times, especially in the vacation, when she was left almost entirely alone, she suffered terribly, as all readers of *Villette* knows. It was shortly before she left Brussels that she paid that visit to the Confessional which she has dramatised in her greatest novel. Mr. Shorter prints a letter to Emily in which she speaks of it lightly as a whim ; but we may be sure that it must have been desperate need which emboldened this sensitive girl—so shy that she could not pass a stranger on the Haworth roads without putting up her hand to hide her face—to seek advice in such a quarter. In after years, in one of her letters she wrote of Lucy Snowe—and

Lucy Snowe, we all know, was Charlotte Brontë—"It was no impetus of healthy feeling which urged her to the confessional, it was the semi-delirium of grief and sickness;" and this, we may be sure, is the true account. What could have been the nature of her communication to the father confessor? She says to Emily, "I actually did confess—a real confession"; but we may safely conclude that it was of sorrow rather than of sin she spoke, and that she sought not absolution but consolation. Consolation, however, did not readily come. Three months later we find her writing to Emily: "Low spirits have afflicted me much lately. . . . I am not ill in body. It is only the mind that is a little shaken—for want of comfort."

Suddenly Charlotte resolved to return home. She was helped to this decision by Mary Taylor, to whom she wrote speaking of the low and depressed condition into which she had fallen. Her friend advised

her to go home or elsewhere at once, otherwise she would not have energy to move, and her friends would be in ignorance of her condition. For this advice Charlotte displayed a gratitude so deep that it seems to have puzzled both her friend and Mrs. Gaskell; but to those who believe in the Brussels tragedy Mary Taylor's words will be significant of much:

"Charlotte wrote that I had done her a great service, that she should certainly follow my advice, and was much obliged to me. I have often wondered at this letter. Though she patiently tolerated advice she could always put it aside and do as she thought fit. More than once afterwards she mentioned the 'service' I had done her. She sent me £10 to New Zealand on hearing some exaggerated accounts of my circumstances, and told me she hoped it would come in seasonably; it was a debt she owed me 'for the service I had done

her.' I should think £10 was a quarter of her income."

Mrs. Gaskell makes it clear that M. and Mme. Héger were surprised at her sudden resolution, but as she alleged as a reason her father's increasing blindness—which, as Mrs. Gaskell admits, was not the whole reason—they could offer no opposition. Her first biographer tells of her deep distress and tears when the time of parting came. On whose account were the tears shed? We know what she thought of Madame Héger, whom she has pilloried as Madame Becke and Mdlle. Reuter; she despised the pupils, she detested the teachers. But, indeed, she answers my question herself in a letter written a month after her return home: "I suffered much before I left Brussels. I think, however long I live, I shall not forget what the parting with M. Héger cost me." In the same letter she writes: "I do not know whether you feel as I do, but there are times now when it appears

to me as if all my ideas and feelings, except a few friendships and affections, are changed from what they used to be; something in one, which used to be enthusiasm, is tamed down and broken. I have fewer illusions; what I wish for now is active exertion—a stake in life. Haworth now seems such a quiet spot, buried away from the world. . . . It seems as if I ought to be working, and braving the rough realities of the world as other people do." Readers of *Shirley* will remember several passages in which Caroline Helstone,* when feeling "the pangs of despis'd love," utters just such plaints as the above. Plainly Charlotte was still suffering under "the total withdrawal of all happiness and peace of mind."

Such were the facts of the Brussels episode as they were known before the

* Caroline Helstone is often said to be a portrait of Miss Ellen Nussey, but this is true only of external aspect: the inner life depicted is undoubtedly that of Charlotte Brontë.

publication of Mr. Shorter's book. But Mr. Shorter, who asks us to scout the idea of any tragedy of the heart at Brussels, adds one or two facts which make it almost impossible to follow his advice. He admits that Madame Héger and her children suspected that Charlotte felt too warmly for her teacher, and he tells us on unimpeachable authority that the subsequent correspondence between Charlotte and M. Héger, after it had lasted only eighteen months, came to an abrupt end through the intervention of Madame Héger, who objected to it. The facts were sufficient before to convince such close Brontë students as Sir Wemyss Reid and Mr. Augustine Birrell of the reality of the Brussels tragedy. With the additions which Mr. Shorter makes it will be more difficult than ever to stop short of this conclusion.

If now we turn from the Brussels

history, as recorded in the biographies, to Charlotte's novels, one or two significant phenomena immediately present themselves. We are surprised to find how absolutely Charlotte accepts M. Héger as her *beau idéal.* Her heroes are nearly always dark men of intense nature, strong-willed, masterful, abrupt, with a dash of the pedagogue, and yet at heart chivalrous and tender. I do not mean that there is any monotony in Charlotte's picture gallery. Each character has its own distinct individuality, but they remind one of the "composite photograph" which is made by combining several faces into one, and in each there is a strong blend of the Brussels professor. In Paul Emanuel we have an undisguised portrait of M. Héger: it is as startlingly lifelike as a Moroni painting; no other character can vie with it in piquancy and interest. Next to it in vividness comes old Helstone, Rector of Briarfield, the "clerical cossack" of

Shirley; he is just the Belgian professor with the imagination and the tender heart omitted from his composition. Robert and Louis Moore and Crimsworth are merely paler copies of the same original with one or two distinguishing traits thrown in. Even Rochester has a few of the same lineaments, though here some other face is superimposed on the dark intense visage which is so familiar to us. As when we have gazed long on some object in a bright light it reproduces itself in whatever direction we look, so was Charlotte's vision haunted by the figure of M. Héger. Account for it how we may, it is clear that this remarkable man dominated her imagination.

Another significant phenomenon is the frequency of love scenes between master and pupil in these works; indeed, the thing is repeated so often that only the sweet magic of Charlotte Brontë's art could have prevented it from becoming wearisome.

In the pages of three out of her four novels love and lessons always go on simultaneously. In this pleasant way Robert Moore in *Shirley* teaches the charming Caroline Helstone, and Louis Moore the equally charming Shirley Keelder. So in *Villette* does M. Paul Emanuel teach Lucy Snowe, and so in *The Professor* does William Crimsworth instruct Frances Henri. How was it that this great writer could hardly picture any wooing which did not involve this relationship? It is certain, of course, that no approach to love-making ever went on in the Pensionnat Héger, but it is difficult to resist the impression that it was the play of the imagination on the memory of her Brussels experiences which produced the scenes which have so subtle a charm for us.

In *Jane Eyre* alone the lovers do not stand in the relation of teacher and taught; but *Jane Eyre* too lends its corroboration to

the theory we are considering. For what is the thesis of the book? *The suffering which is occasioned to a woman who is innocently led into love for one who belongs to another; the agony which in such case the parting costs; the long and painful struggle which ensues in attempting to crucify affections which have no longer the right to live.* How intensely all this is indicated in *Jane Eyre* all readers will know. How poignant is the feeling in the following passage:

"Self-abandoned, relaxed, and effortless, I seemed to have laid me down in the dried-up bed of a great river; I heard a flood loosened in remote mountains, and felt the torrent come. . . . The whole consciousness of my life lorn, my love lost, my hope quenched, my faith death-struck, swayed full and mighty above me in one sullen mass. That bitter hour cannot be described: in truth 'the waters came into my soul; I sank in the deep

mire; I felt no standing; I came into deep waters; the floods overflowed me.'

"Some time in the afternoon I raised my head, and, looking round and seeing the western sun gilding the sign of its decline on the wall, I asked, 'What am I to do?'

"But the answer my mind gave—'Leave Thornfield at once'—was so prompt, so dread, that I stopped my ears: I said I could not bear such words now. 'That I am not Edward Rochester's bride is the least part of my woe,' I alleged: 'that I have wakened out of the most glorious dreams and found them all void and vain is a horror I could bear and master; but that I must leave him decidedly, instantly, entirely, is intolerable. I cannot do it.'

"But then a voice within me averred that I could do it and foretold that I should do it. I wrestled with my own resolution: I wanted to be weak, that I might avoid the awful passage of further

suffering that I saw laid out for me; and conscience, turned tyrant, held passion by the throat, told her tauntingly she had yet but dipped her dainty foot in the slough, and swore that with that arm of iron he would thrust her down to unsounded depths of agony.

"'Let me be torn away, then!' I cried. 'Let another help me.'

"'No; you shall tear yourself away, none shall help you: you shall yourself pluck out your right eye: yourself cut off your right hand: your heart shall be the victim, and you the priest to transfix it.'"

The wrench, Jane Eyre tells us, was worse than death:

"'If I could go out of life now, without too sharp a pang, it would be well for me,' I thought; 'then I should not have to make the effort of cracking my heart-strings in rending them from among Mr. Rochester's. I must leave him, it appears

I do not want to leave him—I cannot leave him.'"

But in the novel we are never permitted to doubt that the heroine will be true to conscience. In her secret heart her determination was taken from the first:

"'I will hold to the principles received by me when I was sane, and not mad—as I am now. Laws and principles are not for the times when there is no temptation: they are for such moments as this when body and soul rise in mutiny against their rigour; stringent are they; inviolate they shall be.'"

No moralist ever more sternly inculcated submission to conscience and principle than did Charlotte Brontë; none more unflinchingly practised it.

Concerning the bearing of *Shirley* and *The Professor* upon the theory of a Brussels tragedy enough has been said. As to *Villette*, it is now everywhere acknowledged that the part of it which

deals with the Pensionnat is autobiography with a mere touch of romance added. All the characters in it can be identified: nothing is changed from the reality except the names. When we remember that Charlotte herself is Lucy Snowe, and that M. Héger is M. Paul Emanuel, the curious ending of the book is significant. Old Mr. Brontë was urgent that the story should end happily, and that the Professor and his pupil should marry; but his daughter, usually so compliant to his wishes, proved in this matter inflexible. She knew that there is a point at which it is necessary to draw the line even in imagination. The lovers in her other novels were composite characters; they had no absolute originals in real life; she could do with them as she would. But as regards Lucy Snowe and Paul Emanuel it was different: hence their ultimate fate is left shrouded in uncertainty, and the curtain falls on them still unwed.

Fact and Fiction

In the poems of Charlotte Brontë we find traces of the same thoughts and ideas which so persistently haunt the novels. As a rule her verses are jejune enough, but the following, taken from a poem entitled "Frances"—a name significant to those who have read *The Professor*—are not wanting in life and passion:

"God help me in my grievous need,
God help me in my inward pain;
Which cannot ask for pity's meed,
Which has no licence to complain,

"Which must be borne; yet who can bear
Hours long, days long, a constant weight—
The yoke of absolute despair,
A suffering wholly desolate?

"Who can for ever crush the heart,
Restrain its throbbings, curb its life?
Dissemble truth with ceaseless art,
With outward calm mask inward strife?

"Unloved I love; unwept I weep;
Grief I restrain, hope I repress:
Vain is the anguish—fixed and deep;
Vainer desires and dreams of bliss.

* * * *

" For me the universe is dumb,
Stone-deaf and blank and wholly blind;
Life I must bound, existence sum
In the strait limits of one mind;

" That mind my own. Oh! narrow cell,
Dark, imageless—a living tomb!
There must I sleep, there wake and dwell
Content with palsy, pain and gloom.

* * * *

" Still strong and young, and warm with vigour,
Though scathed, I long shall greenly grow;
And many a storm of wildest rigour
Shall yet break o'er my shivered bough.

" Rebellious now to blank inertion,
My unused strength demands a task;
Travel and toil and full exertion
Are the last only boon I ask."

Here again we have a love that must remain unspoken, a love which must not even ask for pity; here again we have the agony of unrequited affection, the longing to be set such toilsome tasks as may deaden sensation to the pangs within. For my part I cannot but think that the feelings thus often and eloquently expressed

were the feelings not merely of the author but of the woman.

I might multiply indefinitely passages from Charlotte's works which illustrate the hidden tragedy of her life; but let these suffice as specimens. I think every one will admit that, when taken in conjunction with the facts of her history, they constitute a body of evidence not easily explained away. No doubt it falls short of absolute demonstration. But if the strength of a theory is to be measured by the completeness with which it accounts for the facts of the subject-matter to which it is applied, then this theory must be accounted strong indeed. In the course of our inquiry many questions have presented themselves: Where did Charlotte Brontë obtain that intimate knowledge of love in which she surpasses all other novelists? How is it that she dwells almost exclusively upon the agony of unrequited affection? What was that "irresistible impulse" which

drove her to Brussels the second time? Why did she suffer such fearful distress on parting finally with the Brussels Professor? What was the cause of the two years of utter gloom and despair? Why does the figure of M. Héger haunt the pages of all her novels? Why do her love scenes almost invariably connect themselves with the schoolroom? These and a dozen other questions are all answered by the theory under discussion, and I cannot see that it is possible to answer them in any other way. I do not say this with any desire to convert others to my view—that is not my object. But I think it will be admitted that the subject cannot be dismissed as lightly as Mr. Shorter supposes. On the contrary, there are many of us to whom the quickening of the genius of Charlotte Brontë by a hidden tragedy at Brussels will seem a fact as clearly proved as the nature of the case will admit. We could not think otherwise if we would.

It only remains now to ask, Must those who agree with Sir Wemyss Reid on this matter therefore think less highly of Charlotte Brontë's character? To this question I reply by an emphatic negative. I maintain that, if we accept this sad chapter of her life as authentic, more than ever she answers to Kingsley's description of her as "a valiant woman made perfect by suffering."

He must be a Pharisee indeed who can fail to see that Charlotte was more to be pitied than blamed for the growth of her strong attachment to her teacher. Owing to her shyness and the isolation of her position, she had known no man intimately till she went to Brussels, save her father and brother: she had met at Haworth only a few of those curates whom she described as "highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the 'coarser sex.'" Then suddenly her duty brought her daily into close association with one whose

personality was magnetic, whose intellectual gifts had an irresistible attraction for such a mind as hers, and whose sympathy was, during long lonely months, her only solace amid a world of strangers. The ripening of friendship and gratitude into a stronger feeling would be by imperceptible stages, and she herself would not know when that line was crossed which divides friendship from that stronger form of attachment which makes separation from its object an agony. If we call this attachment "love," it is for want of a more discriminating word: whatever the feeling was, it was known in her consciousness only as suffering, and was kept prisoner in secret in the depths of her own heart. She was "martyr by the pang without the palm." Even Miss Frederika Macdonald, who seems to hold a brief for Madame Héger and her daughters, acknowledges that Charlotte's feeling for her teacher "was not tainted nor disfigured by

the shadow of any attempt or desire to draw on herself affections that were pledged elsewhere." Under all the circumstances it seems to me that, like Jane Eyre in the story, she was drawn into love of her "master" quite innocently. If we have nothing but pity for Jane in the romance, we can have no harsher feeling for Charlotte in real life.

There may be some, indeed, who will assume that Charlotte knew her own heart by the time she first left Brussels. These may perhaps urge that to return was a highly censurable action, and that here she falls far short of the heroic inflexibility of her own heroine, Jane Eyre. But even if we suppose that at this time Charlotte knew the nature of her own feelings—which I am not prepared to admit—her case and Jane Eyre's are not here parallel. Jane, if she had returned to Mr. Rochester, would have gone back to a man who loved her and who was bent on forcing

her into a wrong path. Charlotte, in returning to Brussels, ran no such risks: she went with her will fixed upon carrying out the course she had mapped out, even though it involved the draining of the bitter cup—nine parts gall to one of sweetness—of which she had already tasted. She was one of those strong souls who can walk with security along the edges of dizzy precipices where others would faint. She knew, for she had proved it in many a struggle, that she was mistress of herself. Even had I to grant that in returning to a sphere so dangerous to her peace she was guilty of a moral error, I should recall the path of thorns and flints into which that error led her, and blame would be almost lost in admiration for the Stoic courage with which she trod that path.

For my part, however, I do not grant any moral error. I think that she did not analyse at the time the "irresistible im-

pulse" which took her back to Brussels; that she did not then understand, or but half understood, her own feelings; and that if she failed it was only in that self-knowledge in which we all fail. I cannot agree, however, with a recent writer who, while expressing belief in the tragedy of Charlotte's life, says that probably "never in the most secret and inward imaginations of her own heart" did she describe her feeling for M. Héger as other than friendship. Charlotte Brontë had not that facile power of self-deception which belongs to most of us, and it seems certain that, when she wrote her novels, she recognised clearly the nature of the struggle she had come through. At the same time it should be remembered that "love" has probably as many shades of meaning as there are varieties of human character, and in Charlotte's vocabulary it was expressive of all that is pure and noble. Let me recall the indignant words

[illegible] Miss Martineau in reply to some [illegible] "I know what [illegible] is as I understand it; and if man or woman should be ashamed of feeling such love, then is there nothing right, noble, faithful, truthful, unselfish in this earth, as I comprehend rectitude, fidelity, truth and disinterestedness." True, it is not allowable to cherish even such a feeling as this for one who is another's. But there can be no doubt that, as soon as she thoroughly knew her own heart, Charlotte broke the chain and fled. This involved the same terrible struggle that she describes in two of her novels, and it issued in the same noble victory. The Brussels episode, as I understand it, calls not for the censure of fallible human nature, but for its respectful admiration.

The flight from Brussels did not, as we know, put an end to all intercourse between M. Héger and Charlotte Brontë. For some eighteen months they main-

tained a friendly correspondence, the tone of which can be judged from the specimen of it in Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*. The recent suggestion that Charlotte expressed herself with an unseemly warmth, and that her Brussels friends were therefore obliged to restrict her to two letters a year, which should contain only "a plain account of her circumstances and occupations," need not be too deeply resented since it has called forth, in Mr. Shorter's book, a true account of how the friendly intercourse ceased. Madame Héger, who disliked Charlotte, objected to any correspondence, and M. Héger, unwilling to sever all connection with his talented pupil, asked her to address her letters to a Boys' School where he taught. It was a very unwise suggestion, but not perhaps entirely inexcusable if we assume, as I think we may, that M. Héger had never reason to suspect Charlotte's secret. But his correspondent could give but one reply to such

a request. "I stopped writing at once," she told her friend Miss Wheelwright. "I would not have dreamt of writing to him when I found it was disagreeable to his wife: certainly I would not write unknown to her." This rigid fidelity to principle is what all who know Charlotte Brontë's character would have expected from her on such an occasion. We may be sure it marked all her relations with the Hégers.

To sum up, then: Charlotte Brontë's writings have proved a palimpsest, and scholars have from time to time hinted of the older sentences they could discern beneath the present characters. More recently there have been signs that hints are to be replaced by innuendos, and I have therefore endeavoured to restore the whole of the old text so far as it is still decipherable. It turns out to be a tragedy which for human interest equals anything

in the novels, and which cannot but render those who peruse it wiser and stronger. Its central figure is Charlotte herself, as noble and brave a heroine as any which her imagination created. We see an acute sensitiveness which attracts our pity, wedded to a dauntless fortitude which compels our admiration. We see her sore wounded in her affections, but unconquerable in her will. The discovery of the secret of her life does not degrade the noble figure we know so well; it adds to it a pathetic significance. The moral of her greatest works—that conscience must reign absolute at whatever cost—acquires a greater force when we realise how she herself came through the furnace of temptation with marks of torture on her, but with no stain on her soul. And if there are passages in her books by which she appeals to our deepest experiences as hardly any other writer can, we know now that it was because the pen with which

she wrote was dipped in her heart's blood. The inner lives of few men or women have been unveiled to the public gaze as has that of Charlotte Brontë, but few could stand the scrutiny so well. Those who are most familiar with her history will ever be those most ready to exclaim with Kingsley, "She is a whole heaven above me," and to endorse Sir Wemyss Reid's assertion, "No apology need be offered for any single feature of Charlotte Brontë's life or character."

A CROP OF BRONTË MYTHS

A CROP OF BRONTË MYTHS

IN 1893 Dr. William Wright issued a book* in which he professed not only to trace the history of four generations of Irish Brontës, but to prove that the plot of *Wuthering Heights* was founded on family history, and that the other Brontë novels had likewise an Irish origin. As a Brontë enthusiast I was naturally interested; but when review after review came to hand, all speaking of Dr. Wright's book in laudatory terms, and declaring that he had established his thesis, my curiosity died down, and I accepted this verdict as final. About two years ago I procured his volume for the

* *The Brontës in Ireland; or, Facts stranger than Fiction.* By Dr. William Wright. London: Hodder and Stoughton.

purpose of keeping my Brontë knowledge up to date. Imagine my surprise to find it a work neither consistent nor coherent, bearing its own refutation on every page for any reader who, with adequate knowledge, would examine its statements. It reminded me of nothing so much as of that prophetical literature which once undertook to prove that Napoleon III. was Antichrist, and which still is prepared to fix the date of the end of the world. There was the same absence of all critical faculty, the same unreasoning acceptance of every alleged fact which could serve the end in view, the same substitution of faith for proof. I could only account for the favourable reception of the book by supposing that the reviewers had been too busy to do more than to read it as one would read a novel. I at once wrote an article in the *Westminster Review* (October 1895) pointing out the mythical character of the work; but public interest in the matter was for

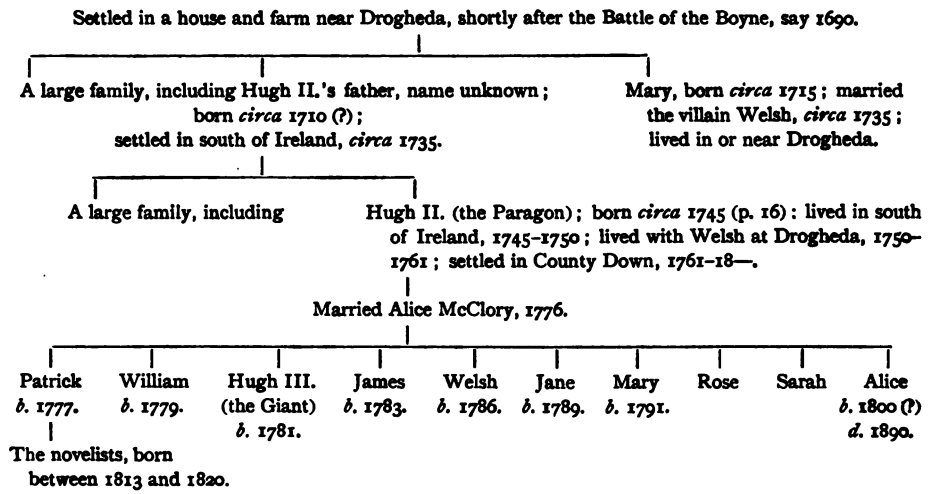
the time spent, and though my criticism attracted the attention of a few Brontë specialists it eluded the notice of that guileless public which had so warmly welcomed *The Brontës in Ireland*, and Dr. Wright himself attempted no reply to my damaging criticism.

So matters remained till the great revival of interest in Brontë history which has marked the last few months. The publication of Mr. Clement Shorter's valuable work, *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, however, then seemed to make further action desirable. It moved Dr. Wright to renewed efforts to circulate his book, and so indirectly promoted the spread of the very mischief which it was my purpose to check. On the other hand, Mr. Shorter, by expressing agreement with my view of *The Brontës in Ireland*, and drawing attention pointedly to the *Westminster* article, compelled Dr. Wright to break silence, and thus has provided me with new material.

It is plainly desirable, therefore, that the matter should now be brought to an issue, and I propose to analyse the work once more with a view to proving, once and for all, that it can have no serious significance for Brontë students. It is not a pleasant task to upset a favourable verdict; but, if Dr. Wright's theories are accepted, the whole broadening stream of Brontë bibliography will be deflected and made turbid. In the interests, then, of truth, and of the Brontë fame, the utterly untrustworthy character of the book must be exposed.

The Genealogical Chart.

As a preparation for our investigation, I shall give, with dates, a genealogical table of the characters who appear in Dr. Wright's pages; and this is the more necessary as our author is as confused in his account of the family relationship as in most else; for example, on p. 19, the


HUGH BRONTË I. (*the Founder*).
Settled in a house and farm near Drogheda, shortly after the Battle of the Boyne, say 1690.
A large family, including Hugh II.'s father, name unknown; born *circa* 1710 (?); settled in south of Ireland, *circa* 1735.
Mary, born *circa* 1715; married the villain Welsh, *circa* 1735; lived in or near Drogheda.
A large family, including
Hugh II. (the Paragon); born *circa* 1745 (p. 16): lived in south of Ireland, 1745–1750; lived with Welsh at Drogheda, 1750–1761; settled in County Down, 1761–18—.
Married Alice McClory, 1776.
Patrick *b.* 1777.
William *b.* 1779.
Hugh III. (the Giant) *b.* 1781.
James *b.* 1783.
Welsh *b.* 1786.
Jane *b.* 1789.
Mary *b.* 1791.
Rose
Sarah
Alice *b.* 1800 (?) *d.* 1890.
The novelists, born between 1813 and 1820.

grandfather of Hugh Brontë II. is called his father, and on p. 49, Hugh I. is described as the great-great-great-grandfather of the novelists, where there is a "great" too much. Once we grasp the relationships, a mere comparison of dates will be enough to bring the whole story toppling down like a house of cards. For the sake of greater distinctness I shall give cognomens to the three Hughs in the chart. The first I shall call the Founder; Hugh II., the grandfather of the novelists, I shall dub the Paragon,* for if Dr. Wright's stories could be accepted he would be one of the most remarkable peasants who ever lived; for the third Hugh, the uncle of the novelists, I will retain the nickname of Dr. Wright's choosing, viz., the Giant, though probably "the Avenger" would be more appropriate in view of the remarkable story,

* I apply this title not, of course, to the real Hugh II., who was doubtless an estimable man, but to the imaginary personage who is the hero of Dr. Wright's romance.

to which I shall have to direct attention further on. I will ask the reader then to refer, when need be, to the chart on p. 91, remembering always that Hugh II. is the character upon whom all else depends, the hero of the whole romance.

Now it is of great importance that the reader should convince himself that this genealogical tree does truly represent the alleged facts as set forth in Dr. Wright's book. The chart appeared originally in the *Westminster* article, and when sixteen months later Dr. Wright attempted a reply, in the *Bookman* of February 1897, his defence took the form of denying the validity of his own dates. He writes as follows :

" Hugh Brontë's [the Paragon's] stories contained no fixed point in chronology. . . . The early Brontë house was on the banks of the Boyne. As a conjecture I placed the date vaguely after the battle which made the river famous. It was a

mere approximation. It might have been earlier or it might have been later; most likely later. I had no chronological landmarks to guide me," &c.

Dr. Wright, as we shall see, has a habit of thus shifting his ground as soon as it is seriously assailed, but he must not suppose that ground so vacated is not in possession of the enemy. His credibility as an historian must necessarily suffer by these sudden changes of his text. Let us see what are his own words in his book: "Shortly after the events which in 1688 rendered the Boyne memorable, Hugh Brontë, the elder, occupied, as we have seen, a house and farm on the banks of that river. It is not improbable that he received his possession for Imperial services rendered in those turbulent times" (p. 156).

Here there is no peradventure about the date, but only as to whether Hugh I. had received the estate as the reward of loyalty.

Hugh II., the Paragon, confirms this latter conjecture; he is made to say: "The Brontës had occupied a piece of forfeited land, with well-defined obligations to a chief or landlord," &c.; and let it be remembered that upon the alleged stories of Hugh II. most of the book is founded, so that if he is not reliable the narrative falls to pieces. But the chart, of course, does not depend upon this one date. On p. 16 Dr. Wright says that Hugh II. was taken from his home by a villain named Welsh "some time about the middle of the last century or a little earlier," when Hugh II. was about five years old. This is not a date about which Hugh II. could have been in error to any material extent, and from this fixed date of 1750 we can work at ease either backwards or forwards. It follows that the Paragon was born *circa* 1745. He was a very young member of a "large" family, he had "numerous brothers and sisters," and therefore his father's

marriage must have been at least ten years earlier say 1735. The father from the story was evidently a young unmarried man of twenty-five or so when he settled in the South of Ireland so that even supposing him to have been married immediately after this he could not have been born later than 1710. He too belonged to a large family and allowing for the time it would take Hugh I., the founder, to accomplish all that the tale tells us drain the estate improve the land build a fine house grow rich by cattle dealing and rear a family to manhood undoubtedly we do find ourselves taken back to the date of the Battle of the Boyne or shortly after. In a similar way, starting from the same date of 1750, we may work downward. Hugh stayed eleven years with Welsh, which brings us to 1761. He married Alice McClory in 1776, and the other dates are from authentic records. Of course *my belief is that most of the*

events covered by these dates are fictitious, but the dates are based on the alleged facts in such a way that, if the facts are as narrated by Dr. Wright, then the chart is, for the purposes of this controversy, unassailable.

The Alleged Originals of *Wuthering Heights.*

Let us glance first at the opening chapter of the romance relating chiefly to Hugh I., the Founder, and Welsh. Hugh I. settled on his farm about 1690, and was a cattle-dealer as well as farmer. He became rich and prosperous. His sons were brought up in comparative luxury, were well educated and had been much in England. Then one day Hugh I. (the Mr. Earnshaw of *Wuthering Heights*) finds on a Liverpool boat a Lascar baby and adopts it. This boy, Welsh (the Heath-

cliffe of *Wuthering Heights*), makes himself very useful to Hugh I., and gradually gets the management of the whole business into his own hands. He uses as tools a hypocrite named Gallagher (the Joseph of *Wuthering Heights*) and a woman, Meg, whose chief business apparently was to murder illegitimate children. At last Hugh I. goes over to Liverpool with the largest consignment of cattle he had ever taken, and on the way back he dies—murdered, we are led to suppose, by Welsh. What has become of the money received for the cattle no one knows; all the business-books have disappeared and the capital is in Welsh's pocket. The villain succeeds after a time in driving his foster-brothers out of the farm to which they cling, and, with Meg's help, he compels Mary, the youngest sister, to marry him. So the curtain falls, with Welsh rich and prosperous, married to his master's daughter and living in the Brontës'

ancestral farm, while the Brontë sons are beggared and homeless.

Now, to begin with, it is somewhat startling to find Dr. Wright describing so minutely events which happened nearly two hundred years ago, when he has nothing but oral tradition to rely upon. And it becomes more than startling when we are told that these events, known in such detail to Dr. Wright and his informants, *were unknown to most of the Irish Brontës themselves*. The *fons et origo* of this history, and of much else to follow, is alleged to be Hugh II., the Paragon, who is represented as a perfect genius, and who told the story in a most graphic fashion to many persons. We may be quite sure that the persons most interested in the story would be his ten children, all of them most remarkable characters according to Dr. Wright, and living nearly a century nearer the alleged events than we. One of these, Alice, lived

to a great age and died in 1802. If they or their children knew not of this story it will appear to most persons that it cannot be true, and further, that it cannot really have originated with Hugh H. And even on Dr. Wright's own showing we might conclude that these narratives do not rest on Brontë evidence. These are his own words on p. 50:

"With the exception of Alice, none of the Irish Brontës knew anything of the early history of the family. I visited most of them, and the vague information they had to communicate was merely an echo from English biographies. Even Alice mixed up different events in a way sometimes that made it difficult to disentangle them."

What Alice's evidence amounted to we shall have occasion to see later on.

Further, the story itself is surely incredible. Even at the beginning of last century an interloper could not murder his

foster-father and embezzle the whole of a rich man's capital without being criminally prosecuted. If Welsh had had to do with helpless children the improbabilities would have been less, but he had to do with a number of young men "brought up in comparative luxury" and "well educated," and when we realise these circumstances the story becomes absurd.

Moreover, if Hugh II. was indeed responsible for this piece of family history, it will be well to know with what sort of an historian we are dealing. He tells us repeatedly (p. 148) that his grandfather, Hugh I., was unjustly dealt with by means of legal documents issued under George III.'s authority. It will be seen that Hugh I. would have been over one hundred years old when George III. ascended the throne in 1760, and as he left a young family behind him when he died, he must have begun the begetting of his numerous offspring when he was about

eighty! Wonderful men, truly, these Irish Brontës!

But it is time we passed on to the next stage of this romance. When the curtain again rises "many years" have elapsed (p. 32). I calculate these years as fifteen at the least; nothing less will meet the demands of the history. Welsh, whom we left in the possession of all the fortune of a "rich and prosperous" man, has fallen into abject poverty. His foster brothers and sisters with one exception have all disappeared for ever. But the exception, the unnamed father of Hugh II., though he had not a penny when we last saw him, is now "a man in prosperous circumstances" (p. 16). He is married and has a large family, and his children live in luxury (pp. 111 and 154). Farming in those days appears to have resembled stock-broking in these from the rapidity with which fortunes were made and lost. One of the younger members of this family was

the famous Hugh II., the Paragon, at this time aged five. Suddenly appears on the scene the infamous Welsh, who represents himself as a rich but childless man pining to adopt a little boy. He succeeds, of course, in his nefarious scheme and carries off little Hugh II., having first exchanged a melodramatic oath with the father—Welsh and his wife swearing that they will never let Hugh II. know where his family live, and the little boy's father swearing that he will never inquire about him. Then they drive off, and before the lights of home have disappeared Welsh begins to beat the child brutally. Then follow eleven years of the most cruel oppression, and at last, when aged sixteen, Hugh II. runs away and begins life for himself. He never succeeds, however, in discovering any trace of his father or his family.

Surely nothing but the improbabilities are necessary to expose the falsity of this

so-called history. Hugh II.'s father, in common with all the family, knew Welsh to be an unmitigated scoundrel of the deepest dye; why then should he and his wife give up to him a son to whom they were tenderly attached? The plea of poverty does not come in, for they were rich and prosperous. Again, what possible object could Welsh, too poor to support himself, have in burdening himself with a little child? Later on it is stated that he was promised £50 with the child, which he did not receive. But Welsh, in his feigned character of a rich man, could not have asked for money, and if he had, that at least would have opened the father's eyes to his real motives. Again, how are we to suppose that his wife, the excellent Mary, could have lent herself to the diabolical scheme? And the way in which the story is told is at least as ridiculous as the plot. The child, if he had been Prince Alexander of Battenberg, could not have

been carried off with greater precautions against recovery: they travelled only by night, and slept during the day, and for four nights the journey was continued. In Chapter VI. we have a minutely detailed account of all that happened during that fearful journey, and a highly coloured description of the scenery, interspersed with metaphysical reflections, and all based on the recollections of a child of five! With a remarkable want of humour the story makes Welsh address this infant at the journey's end thus: "This is the only home you shall ever know, and you are beholden to me for it. No airs here, my fine fellow! Your father was glad to be rid of you, and this is the gratitude you show me for taking you to be my heir. Go to bed out of my way, and I'll find you something to do in the morning to keep you from becoming too great for the position."

To complete the absurdity of the story, Welsh becomes a father for the first time

the year before Hugh runs away, or about thirty years after his marriage with Mary!

Before leaving this part of the alleged history it is necessary to point out that the scenes where these too earlier parts of the drama were enacted—like nearly all the other evidence—are lost. As to the house and farm, probably given in return for services during the political troubles of William III.'s reign, Dr. Wright fears "that the tradition has now faded out of the district." He says that this is not to be wondered at, since few families of the rank of the Brontës can trace pedigrees to the sixth or seventh generation. But this excuse will not do. Alice, as we have seen, lived till 1890, and her grandfather is alleged to have dwelt on the ancestral farm till he was a young man of twenty-five or so; moreover, her father, Hugh II., had lived in the immediate neighbourhood from his fifth till his sixteenth year. Alice, indeed, is quoted to the effect that an Aunt Mary,

who visited her when a child, then still lived near Drogheda on the Boyne, and Dr. Wright would have us believe that this was no other than Mrs. Welsh. But when we examine the evidence it is of a piece with all the rest, and is indeed not a little ludicrous. A reference to our genealogical table will show that I have put Mary Welsh's birth at 1715. That it could not be later than that, supposing the history a true one, I will now show beyond all reasonable doubt. Hugh II. was taken off by Welsh, says Dr. Wright, about the year 1750 (p. 16). Welsh had then been married "many years" (p. 32), and as I have already shown, fifteen years at least must be allowed for the events which intervene. This gives us 1735 as the year when Welsh married Mary. As he had tried for some years in vain to make her marry him, we cannot be far wrong in supposing her to be twenty at least in 1735, and if so she cannot have

been born later than 1715. Now old Alice Brontë, who was born in 1800, said she remembered her Aunt Mary coming from Drogheda to visit her when a child. Even supposing Alice to have been then only five years old, Aunt Mary must have been about ninety. How then did old Alice describe this nonogenarian? "Tarrible purty she was. *A shop-keeper in Rathfriland courted her. . . . After she went home he sent after her but she would not take him!*"* Dr. Wright in his book suggests Alice may have alluded to a daughter of Aunt Mary's, but though he was in correspondence with Alice Brontë "directly and indirectly till her death," she made no such admission. Besides, as I have already pointed out, Mary could scarcely have had a daughter after being childless for thirty years. Clearly it can be proved from the book itself that the visit of this Aunt Mary, Mrs. Welsh, is apocryphal.

* The italics here and throughout are mine.—A. M. M.

But, as I have already warned the reader, Dr. Wright, when convicted of an absurdity, promptly shifts his ground. He has done so in this case; but I shall now show that this manœuvre does not enable him to escape from the horns of the dilemma. After the absurdity of the story was brought to his notice, Dr. Wright defended himself thus in the *Bookman* of February 1897:

"I followed the tradition that the lady was Hugh's Aunt Mary, but Alice assured Mr. Lusk* that she was Hugh's sister, and Miss Shannon† is of the same opinion. Possibly she may have been a younger sister of Hugh's, who may have been staying at Drogheda with Aunt Mary after the tragic death of Welsh."

In the first place, I must submit that a statement given at first hand is not a "tradition," and the story of Mrs. Welsh's

* Rev. J. B. Lusk, who visited Alice Brontë on her deathbed, and took down her account of the family.

† Great-grand-daughter of Hugh II., the Paragon.

visit is told three times in the book, and the authority for it is twice given as Alice Brontë, who "distinctly remembered it" (pp. 50 and 158). Now Dr. Wright, as we have seen, corresponded with old Alice to the last. On a matter of such importance could he have been deceived? I will show that he cannot have been. On p. 34, alluding to the solemn oath Mary Welsh took never to reveal the situation of the home from which Hugh II. had been taken, Dr. Wright says:

"The Brontë covenant was faithfully kept, and even when Mary (Welsh) visited Hugh in County Down some time about the beginning of this century *she could neither be coaxed nor compelled to give him either directly or indirectly a clue or hint by which he might discover the home of his childhood.*"

Is that statement true? If it is, why does Dr. Wright now hint that it was not Mary Welsh at all who paid the visit, but a sister of Hugh II.'s, who could have had no

reason to keep from him the site of his old home? If it is not true, Dr. Wright owes it to himself to let us know who invented this misstatement. The truth is, the story is damaged beyond rehabilitation. It is clear that there is no Brontë evidence, and nothing beyond late and loose tradition, to show that the Drogheda farm and house "probably given for imperial services" ever existed.

Again, as regards the house of Hugh II.'s father "in the South of Ireland," there is the same absence of all evidence. Dr. Wright, when a young man, once spent two months, "disguised as a peasant," trying to find some trace of it, but in vain. One is not surprised at this after the lapse of more than a century, but how are we to account for the fact that Alice Brontë, Hugh the Paragon's youngest daughter, was not apparently aware of the existence of this house? In the narrative taken

down by the Rev. J. B. Lusk—one of the few documents quoted by Dr. Wright—Alice declares that her father "came originally from Drogheda," on the Boyne. This ignorance of the Brontë relatives about the house "in the South of Ireland" is even more difficult to account for than the loss of all trace of the ancestral farm near Drogheda.

However, since Dr. Wright's book appeared, a great discovery has been made. The real home, so we are assured, has been identified. The manner of its discovery is so amusing and so characteristic of the methods by which the "facts" of this extraordinary book have been compiled, that I shall briefly allude to it.* A gentleman from that part of Ireland where the Brontë myths originated, viz., County Down, heard that a ferryman on Lough Erne, Frank Prunty by name, said that he

* The narrative will be found in the *Bookman*, February 1897.

was related to the Brontës. This enthusiastic gentleman secured a photographer and a camera, and at once set out to investigate the matter—for might not this be a representative of the long-lost family upon whom the curtain fell in 1750? He found that the ferryman had heard of the existence of the County Down Brontës, and no doubt tourists had from time to time spoken to him of the supposed identity of the names Prunty and Brontë. Asked about his ancestry, he said: "My father was a native of these parts, but my grandfather or my great-grandfather came from somewhere about Galway." This must have been a damper! The Brontë who was "wanted" was one whose ancestors had been driven by Welsh out of the ancestral home near Drogheda on the Boyne. However, after an afternoon spent in conversation and taking views of Mr. Prunty and his home, the gentleman happened to mention Drogheda in con-

nection with the Brontës; thereupon the ferryman seems to have pricked up his ears, and declared that he had made a mistake. He had meant to say that his ancestor came not from Galway but from Drogheda; he had confused the names!

This is the story as told in the *Bookman*. But in contradiction to this is the account of another gentleman, quoted in the third edition of *The Brontës in Ireland*, who, having interviewed Frank Prunty, reports, "He knew *nothing of the family beyond his grandfather*. . . . He had *no idea* of what part of the country his grandfather had come from"! In this third edition Dr. Wright is quite certain that it was Frank's grandfather who founded the "South of Ireland" home, and so here we have another of those laughable consequences in which this book abounds. Frank Prunty's father was, according to both the accounts, born in 1803; and if the reader will consult the genealogical table,

on page 91 he will find that on Dr. Wright's theory he was a brother of Hugh II. the Paragon. Now Hugh, who was a younger member of a large family, was born, we are told explicitly, about the year 1745. So that the wonderful Brontë who first settled in the South of Ireland—the great-grandfather of the novelist—*had a large family by* 1745, *and then went on begetting children for nearly sixty years longer!* This is the conclusion to which Dr. Wright's contentions lead us, and there is no escape from it.

The Frank Prunty story is indeed at every point irreconcilable with Dr. Wright's book. Hugh II. had always described the lost home as "in the South of Ireland." Lough Erne is in the north-east. Dr. Wright tells us, with particularity, that there were three brothers scattered from the ancestral home by the Boyne; but Frank Prunty says "there were two brothers of them, but only my great-

grandfather came down here." Furthe
he says the other brother "went off t
wards Belfast, Newry, or somewhere
that direction, but my father never kne
any of that branch." No doubt he
his father founded this last conjecture
their knowledge that there were Bront
settled in County Down; but these we
of course, the novelists' aunts and uncl
and their descendants, well known to
Wright and his informants, and not me
bers of the missing family. The read
shall judge for himself whether it is now
settled fact that Frank Prunty is a desce
dant of Hugh II.'s father, who was l
heard of in 1750, and he must form
own conclusion as to the credibility o
witness who does not know whether it w
his grandfather or his great-grandfath
who first settled at Lough Erne; who c
fuses Galway with Drogheda; and who
can say not only at which part of the ro
two brothers parted in 1735, viz., "som

where about Castle Sanderson," but can tell in what direction his great-great-uncle then went off! But Dr. Wright, of course, has no doubts. He speaks of his friend's visit to Lough Erne as "the identification of a vigorous descendant of the dispersed Brontës," and he adds: "I think that most people capable of weighing evidence will be satisfied that at last the early home of Hugh Brontë has been discovered, *and the leading facts in his stories confirmed!*"

Before leaving this part of my subject it only remains to summarise the evidence of members of the Brontë family living or recently living. When I attacked the book in 1895 I had only the author's own statements to go upon, but my criticisms and those of Mr. Shorter have elicited external testimony which confirms the results at which I had arrived in every particular. When we have this before us we shall not only be convinced that the earlier stories are inventions, but we shall

find ourselves wondering where Dr. William Wright could have obtained his information, and how he could have persuaded himself to believe them and to publish them.

In the first place, the truth about Alice's testimony is now being extracted piecemeal. Even in his book Dr. Wright incautiously quotes Alice as saying: "My father came originally from Drogheda" (p. 157). In the *Sketch* of March 10 1897, we have her story in the oblique narration as reported by the Rev. J. B Lusk: "Her father Hughey came from Drogheda. When he was eight years of age an uncle took him from his father's place, intending to make him his heir as he had no children. But after he went to his uncle's his aunt had a child. Her father then left his uncle and came to Erndale (County Down) and never saw either his mother or uncle again."

Here we have a plain unvarnished tale with no gleam of romance about it. There is no word about a home in the South of Ireland, about an abduction, about the brutality of Welsh, or any of the strange things in Dr. Wright's story. We have already seen that Dr. Wright himself—in contradiction to all that he asserts in his book—is now inclined to own that Alice never said anything about Mary Welsh, the villain's wife, visiting Hugh II., but that the visitor was Hugh's sister; so that evidently Alice had never even heard of the lost family and the lost homestead. Plainly she thought that her father was a peasant who had emigrated from the neighbourhood of Drogheda on the Boyne, and had peasant relatives there.

We have now also the evidence of Mrs. Heslip to go upon.* This relative of the Brontës has been recently discovered at Oakenshaw, near Bradford. At the

* See *Sketch*, February 10, 1897.

time when his book was appearing in the pages of *McClure's Magazine* her existence was unknown to Dr. Wright, and indeed to every other Brontë student. Mrs. Heslip is a daughter of Sarah, the only one of the novelists' aunts who married. She is thus a granddaughter of the Paragon, and she lived among her uncles and aunts till her seventeenth year. Her testimony must of necessity outweigh that of Dr. William Wright. She says of the earlier stories in his book that she must have heard of them if they had been true —which is obvious—and that she entirely discredits the whole of them.

To these I can now add the testimony of Miss Maggie Shannon, of Ballynaskeagh, who may be taken to represent all the County Down Brontës. Miss Shannon is the granddaughter of Welsh Brontë,* the fourth brother of the Rev.

* We are left to suppose that this Welsh was named after the villain of an earlier generation—an improbable

Patrick Brontë. Her mother during her unmarried life lived next door to the home of Hugh II. and his sons, and after her marriage lived only a mile away, and saw them almost daily. She thus had complete knowledge, and her knowledge descends to her daughter, who has never left the neighbourhood. She writes me as follows:

"We never heard the story of little Hugh Brontë's abduction nor of any one of the name of Welsh connected with him. Hugh Brontë [II.] was an only son and had just one sister, and they were living with an uncle, a brother of their mother's, in Drogheda, both parents being dead. Hugh afterwards came down to the neigh-

story on the face of it. Miss Shannon, however, tells me that her grandfather, Welsh, was named after a clergyman in their neighbourhood. We must, therefore, reverse the supposition, and believe that Dr. Wright's melodramatic villain was named after Miss Shannon's grandfather by the individual—whoever he was—who invented the myth.

bourhood of Hilltown to some relatives of his mother. . . . His sister visited him once after his marriage."

Finally, there is the very important evidence of the Rev. A. B. Nicholls, the husband of Charlotte Brontë, who still survives. He lived at the parsonage alone with the Rev. Patrick Brontë for six years. His father-in-law, we are told, was by no means disposed to reticence, yet he "never heard one single word about the stories," and believes them to be "purely legendary."*

From these witnesses it becomes clear that not only Alice, Sarah, Welsh and Patrick, but all the other sons and daughters of Hugh II., were ignorant of the romantic incidents narrated by Dr. Wright. Yet Dr. Wright asks us to believe that Hugh II. was constantly narrating them. He says of the account of the abduction, which occupies sixteen pages of his book, that

* *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 158.

he received it from *four different narrators*, and that all agreed on the main incidents (p. 46), and he states in the *Bookman* (February 1897) that he "*knew Hugh's minute narrative by heart.*" Can any one reconcile these two sets of facts? I confess I cannot. It is clear that the stories are untrue; and it seems now equally certain that it was not Hugh II. who propagated them. Who then was it that hoaxed the four narrators? I fear we must leave the problem as quite unsolvable.*

I have now concluded the examination of that part of Dr. Wright's story which he alleges forms the groundwork of *Wuthering Heights*. Since its manifold absurdi-

* Dr. Wright is now inclined to make much of a letter received in 1894 from a Mr. John Brontë, in New Zealand, a grand-nephew of the Rev. Patrick Brontë. It confirms some details about the novelists' uncles which are not in dispute, but it says nothing about the older stories of which we may be sure this Mr. John Brontë never heard. He says the only point to which he can *take exception* is the application of the term

ties were exposed in the *Westminster*, the author has drawn a careful distinction between two parts of his book; what goes before Hugh II.'s flight from Welsh, he says, is traditional, what follows is historical. I am afraid this is somewhat of an afterthought. Traditional, of course, much of the book is in the sense that it has been orally transmitted, but Dr. Wright certainly intended us to accept it as quite trustworthy in all material points. The sub-title of his volume is "Facts Stranger than Fiction"; in the chapter on the sources of his information he calls the narrative "history" (p. 14), and at the beginning of his book he says: "I do not

Shebeen to a lawful grocery business kept by his great-uncle, but that does not mean that he is prepared to endorse all the rest. He adds also: "Of one thing I am certain; you have given to the world the last word on the history of the Brontës in the British Isles;" and in a sense this is true, for the biographical facts about the novelists' uncles and aunts which we owe to the Rev. J. B. Lusk are probably all we shall ever know. (For this letter, see *Bookman*, March 1897.)

even now pretend to have reached absolute accuracy on every point referred to in the following pages, but the statements are as close approximation to fact as they can be made by patient industry" (p. 13). To his critics, however, it is not of the least importance whether he calls the earlier chapters history or tradition; the only question is, *are they true?* If not, they have no interest for Brontë students. I think I have shown that they are alike inconsistent and incredible; and therefore the assertion that early Brontë history is the basis of *Wuthering Heights* falls to the ground. I proceed, however, to examine those parts of the book which Dr. Wright declares to be history and to involve "practical certainty," and we shall soon discover that most of the history is as mythical as the tradition; nay, that the nearer the story approaches our own time the more clearly it can be shown to have no foundation in fact.

Hugh II. (the Paragon).

As the story of Hugh the Paragon is the nucleus of the whole book, and as he is the alleged authority for most of the startling facts with which it abounds, it will be well to realise what manner of person he was. Let me first quote the undoubtedly genuine record of him from the lips of his daughter Alice as taken down by the Rev. J. B. Lusk: "My father came originally from Drogheda. He was not very tall but purty stout; he was sandy-haired and my mother fair-haired. He was very fond of his children, and worked to the last for them." Dr. Wright's account is a rather more highly coloured description. Hugh II. was handsome in person and powerful in build, but his physical gifts were as nothing compared with his mental endowments. He was apparently in the very first rank of great

speakers. "Mr. Mc Allister had heard most of the orators of his time, including O'Connell and Cooke and Chalmers, but no man ever touched or roused and thrilled by the force of eloquence as old Hugh Brontë did" (p. 47). In force of imagination he surpassed the girls who made his name famous—indeed their novels were only his own stories in an inferior dress: "It may be questioned if any tale ever told by Hugh Brontë's granddaughters equalled those which he narrated in wealth of imagination or picturesque eloquence or intensity of human feeling or vividness of colouring or immediate effect" (p. 47). Only opportunity was wanting to make him a great politician: "Under different circumstances he might have been an advanced statesman, and saved his country from unutterable woe" (p. 134). Such was the remarkable person from whom Dr. Wright indirectly derived most of the material from which his book is constructed.

When we resume this hero's history at Mount Pleasant, whither at the age of sixteen he had fled from the tyrant Welsh, we find still much to marvel at. While serving at a lime-kiln he falls in love with the sister of a young man evidently of his own class. Difficulties arising on the part of the lady's Roman Catholic relations, he leaves the kiln and secretly takes service in her neighbourhood as a farm servant; and then we hear that this peasant girl "was permitted to ride about the neighbourhood quite alone. She enjoyed horse exercise greatly," and she always rides "her own mare." She is, in fact, suddenly transformed into a squire's daughter. But to read Dr. Wright's book is like being in a dream, nothing surprises. Hugh II. at last secures her, of course in the most romantic way and under the most extraordinary circumstances, eloping with her on the morning when she was to have been married to a rival; and Dr. Wright is able to tell us exactly

what had been prepared for that wedding breakfast in 1776—*it has been handed down orally for a century and a quarter*—viz., a great pudding of flour and potatoes, two large turkeys in melted butter, and a huge roast of beef, &c. Having thus secured as a wife one who was "probably the prettiest girl in County Down at the time," the Paragon settles in that henceforth classic region, and in a small way prospers more and more as time rolls on!*

We must not suppose, however, that Hugh II. became as other men, and that the world is to regard him merely as the grandfather of Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Dr. Wright claims for him that he was the author of the modern theory of tenant-right.

* The story of the runaway match is as mythical as the rest. Mrs. Heslip herself remembers her grandmother, Alice McClory, but "she never heard of any runaway marriage, such as described by Dr. Wright, which would have surely been a family tradition if it had taken place." I have a letter, too, from Miss Shannon, which shows that no rumour of such a thing has ever reached the County Down Brontës.

He makes much of this claim, and foreshadows it early in his book. In describing the eviction of Hugh I.'s family by Welsh, which must have taken place about the year 1730, or fifteen years before the birth of Hugh II., he says: "This sordid transaction was fraught with far-reaching consequences to landlordism. It gave birth to a tenant-right theory of which we shall hear something in a subsequent chapter." Subsequent chapters inform us that Hugh II. derived from this eviction his views upon the land question, and that with these views he revolutionised Ireland. Some years after his flight from Welsh, he became, we are told, farm labourer to a country gentleman named Harshaw. The children of this country gentleman conceived a liking for Hugh II., now a grown man, and taught him to read, as Catherine taught Hareton Earnshaw in *Wuthering Heights*—an interesting fact if it can be established, but no proof is vouchsafed.

The chain of evidence is then continued in the following extraordinary fashion. Jane Harshaw, who taught Hugh II. to read, *may* have imbibed as a child his theory of tenant-right. She afterwards married a neighbouring gentleman, Samuel Martin, and had a son John. Jane Martin *may* have instilled into her son John the tenant-right notions she had adopted as a child from the farm servant. John Martin met at school the famous John Mitchell, and *may* have communicated to him the ideas he had imbibed from his mother. After mentioning these possibilities and suppositions, Dr. Wright sums up : '*I think there is no doubt* that John Martin's belief and principles grew from seeds sown by Hugh Brontë, the servant boy, in the sympathetic mind of his mother."

Well, but the proof? Surely all this will not be put forward without some evidence? Yes, a witness is called, and one only, but his testimony is rather upsetting.

Of course, if Hugh II. had produced such an impression on the Harshaw family, had been taught by the children, and was the indirect means of sending one of the grandchildren to penal servitude for ten years (p. 98), his memory would have survived among the Harshaws or nowhere. But what says the present representative of the family? "The *probability* is that Hugh Brontë hired with my grandfather, whose land touched the Lough; *but I fear it is too true that he passed through my grandfather's service and left no permanent record behind him*" (p. 96).

But we have not disclosed the whole of the debt which the Irish tenants of to-day owe to Hugh II. For Hugh II. was a tenant on an estate which belonged to Sharman Crawford, "a landlord who first took up the cause of tenant-right, and after spending a long life in its advocacy bequeathed its defence to his sons and daughters;" and it seems to Dr. Wright

"*not only probable but morally certain*" that the words of Brontë II., dropped into the justice-loving minds of the Crawfords, were the primary seeds of all the recent land legislation in Ireland. But again we ask, what evidence is there? Dr. Wright replies: "I knew the late W. Sharman Crawford, M.P., well; and I once talked with him of Hugh Brontë's tenant-right theories, of which he was thoroughly aware. *I did not ask him if his father had got his views from Brontë, as I had no doubt of the fact*" (p. 153). However, he apparently did ask another member of the family, Miss M. Sharman Crawford, and she sent the following very sensible reply: "My father certainly originated tenant-right as a public question, though, no doubt, long before the period when he strove to amend the position of Irish tenants, many thoughtful minds like his must have protested against the legalised injustice to which they were subject" (p. 153). She admits, that is,

that Hugh Brontë, like many others, *may* have proclaimed the injustice under which tenants in Ireland were growing, but about Dr. Wright's little story she evidently knew nothing. No doubt, thousands of men of every rank, even earlier than Hugh II.'s time, must have given utterance to just such sentiments as are attributed to him in Dr. Wright's book.* But there is not a shred of evidence to connect our mythical hero with recent Irish legislation, or to show that the Irish Land Acts are due to the eviction of the novelists' ancestors at the beginning of last century. I have examined this part of Dr. Wright's book at some length because it is typical of the rest, being a mass of illogical assumptions unsupported by even the semblance of proof. Indeed the whole history of Hugh II. seems to be a pure myth. Beyond the fact that

* They are given apparently almost verbatim, and occupy nearly ten pages. We cannot but wonder at the prodigious memories which have preserved for us these century-old records.

the novelists' grandfather was named Hugh and that he married an Alice McClory in 1776, I doubt whether we can depend on a line of the book relating to Hugh the Paragon.

The Irish Uncles and Aunts of the Novelists.

In considering Dr. Wright's stories about the next generation of the Brontës, the uncles and aunts of the novelists, the reader often finds himself asking, Did or did not Dr. Wright personally know these remarkable individuals, and if so what was the extent of his intimacy with them? In his chapter on the sources of his information he merely says that "he came into contact with the Irish Brontës *as a child*," and we read on, assuming that his minute information about these prodigies is derived from others. But presently our belief is unsettled. He says of Hugh III. (the Giant) in a note on p. 292 :

"I often talked with Hugh of his adventure in England, but the conversation always came to an abrupt termination if I referred to Haworth or the object of his mission."

Here he seems to know one of the most remarkable characters in the book quite intimately. Another passage confirms this impression. Dr. Wright declares on p. 173:

"When I first began to take an interest in the Brontës I was admonished in a mysterious manner to have nothing to do with such people. I was advised to keep out of their way lest I should hear their odious language; and it was even hinted that they might in some satanic way do me bodily harm."

From the context it seems impossible to suppose that Dr. Wright is not here referring to the Irish aunts and uncles; and yet to our surprise in the body of his book he seems to know nothing of them himself. Even when he tells us such trivial facts as

that one was "very smart" or that another could play the fiddle, the facts are never given at first hand. Old Alice at least we should have supposed was personally known to him; but though he was "in correspondence with her directly or indirectly till her death," whenever her remarks are quoted it is always something that she has said to the Rev. J. B. Lusk. It is curious in what an atmosphere of fog Dr. Wright leaves all his sources of information.

But, however his material may have been acquired, it is certain that even when the book brings us down to the time of the novelists' uncles and aunts the mythical air is not all dispersed. Dr. Wright gives a description of these most remarkable persons. It was given him when a boy by his teacher, the Rev. Mr. McAllister, and Mr. McAllister received it in turn from a young cousin; but although this tradition is the best part of a century old, and has been handed down through three generations,

Dr. Wright is able to give it *apparently word for word to the length of eight pages!* The scene described (Chapter XVIII.) is the *al fresco* concert, dance and sports, in which the young men and maidens of the Brontë family indulged every favourable afternoon on the "Brontë dancing green." The whole is like a scene from Spenser's *Faëry Queen*, and shows these Brontës to have been extraordinary and unique indeed, moving habitually in "the light that never was on land or sea." The observers whose words Dr. Wright records were "very young at the time"—and so we should have supposed from their inflated language—but apparently they were old enough to be struck, not only by the beauty and stateliness of form of the Brontës, and the poetry of their movements, but also by the originality of their conversation. We are told of their "quaint conceptions," "glowing thoughts," and their "expressions far from commonplace";

they used language which "literally made the flesh creep and the hair stand on end," and they uttered their thoughts "with a pent-up and concentrated energy never equalled in rugged force by the novelists." Dr. Wright assures us that they were looked upon as uncanny by the common people, and "held themselves carefully aloof" from their neighbours. Unfortunately this generation of Brontës lived so near our own time that it is impossible to keep off from them altogether "the light of common day," and with Dr. Wright's aid we get the historical view of these aunts and uncles of the novelists side by side with the semi-mythical. Welsh opened a public-house, which became a meeting-place for the fast youth of the district. Later, William kept a shebeen which became a source of degradation both to the neighbourhood and himself. James was a shoemaker, and his sister Alice describes him as one who "took a hand at every-

thing, and was very smart and active with his tongue. He was a great favourite with children." Hugh III. and Welsh the same sister describes as very industrious, and making a great deal of money by macadamising roads. In fact, the brothers and sisters belonged to a capable type of Irish peasant, but were by no means the awesome and ideal figures of the myth. Nor did they always drop pearls and diamonds when they opened their mouths, as the Spenserian chapter would have us believe. There are several of their sayings scattered through the book, and all of the most ordinary description. I have already given Alice's account of her Aunt Mary. Then there is James's account of Charlotte on his return from a visit to Haworth: "Charlotte is tarrible sharp and inquisitive." It is admitted that they were unable to understand their nieces' novels. They took them, we are told, to the Rev. Mr. McKee, and were delighted when he

pronounced them "gran'," so that they could tell their neighbours, "Mr. McKee thinks Charlotte very cliver." It is interesting to compare in this manner the real characters with the ideal. We thus learn that, as the sun can make a gorgeous sunset out of mist and smoke, so a beautiful myth can be evolved out of most commonplace elements, provided a succession of enthusiastic imaginations be set to work upon them. That the *al fresco* chapter, apart from its want of harmony with other accounts of these Brontës, is inconsistent in itself, any careful reader will discover who will keep in mind the dates recorded in our genealogical chart, and remember that the scene described in that chapter took place in 1812.*

* *E.g.*, the women are described thus: "They were mature maidens, but they had not lost their elegant figures or their fresh red and white complexions." This would lead us to suppose them women of thirty-five; in point of fact, in 1812 the three eldest were aged twenty-three, twenty-one, and twenty respectively.

The conclusion to which the book itself led me is strikingly confirmed by the external evidence which has become available since my original exposure of Dr. Wright's work appeared. The terms in which I described the real Irish Brontës are re-echoed quite independently by Miss Shannon, who, of course, speaks with complete knowledge. She writes that "there was nothing remarkable about them more than any other family" save their foreign appearance and quickness to resent insult. Mrs. Heslip's evidence shows that whenever Dr. Wright goes beyond such bare facts as that one macadamised roads and another kept a public-house, he falls into error. Throughout his book he insists, as we have seen, on the fact that these Brontës kept much to themselves, and were looked upon as uncanny by their neighbours. He supports this by saying (p. 239) that they went regularly to no place of worship; that if ever they did drop into a meeting-house,

they were stared at as reprobates by the worshippers; that they incurred "the stigma of living like heathen." Mrs. Heslip says, on the contrary, they went to church regularly, and continued to do so till the infirmities of old age kept them at home; and the County Down Brontës emphatically confirm this statement. Again, Dr. Wright has some marvellous ghost stories to tell of Hugh III. (the Giant). Ghost-baiting, he says, was a passion with the Brontës. One of Hugh's sisters lived in a house in which a man named Frazer had committed suicide. Frazer's ghost haunted the house, and Hugh III. sought to exorcise it, and challenged it to a combat. He afterwards retired to bed in a delirium of frenzy, and during the night the ghost appeared and gave him a squeeze, from which he died shortly after in great agony. Dr. Wright's book leaves us with the impression that this is a family tradition and he says, more-

over, that an old fellow named Norton, still living, can confirm it. Hugh's niece and grand-niece, however, point out that there is no excuse for perpetuating such a tale, since Hugh lived till March 1863, when he died a very old man and without suffering.* Then there is another marvellous yarn about Hugh III. and the devil. On the occasion of a potato blight this Hugh believed that the devil in bodily form had destroyed the crop, and resolved not to submit tamely to this personal injury. In order to insult the fiend he determined to gather a basketful of rotten potatoes, and taking them to the edge of a precipice, to "call on the devil to behold his foul and filthy work, and then with

* A correspondent points out to me that in his third edition, at the end of a footnote in small print quoting old Norton's testimony, Dr. Wright adds, in two lines, the true facts as given by Hugh's relations. By these facts the story is completely destroyed; but instead of cancelling the myth Dr. Wright puts the refutation where few will notice it.

great violence dash them down as a feast for the fetid destroyer." Dr. Wright describes the incident in the following melodramatic style :

"With bare outstretched arms, the veins in his neck and forehead standing out like hempen cords, and his voice choking with concentrated passion, he would apostrophise Beelzebub as the bloated fly, and call on him to partake of the filthy repast he had provided. The address ended with wild scornful laughter as Brontë hurled the rotten potatoes down the bank" (p. 184).

A spectator told Dr. Wright that for a few seconds he watched in terror, expecting the fiend to appear, so powerful was the spell of Hugh's earnestness. But now, as Prince Henry said to Falstaff, "mark how a plain tale shall put you down;" this inconvenient Mrs. Heslip is here to give us the true version : "I gathered potatoes, and helped him to carry the basket to the

cliffs; and as we emptied he would say, in a laughing style and for fun, 'There's a mouthful for the devil.'" In fact, she says, her uncle was full of such rollicking humour on these occasions that she would lie down on the ground and roar with laughter. Here again we see how, under the touch of an enthusiastic fancy, a commonplace incident can be transformed into a romantic myth. The latter part of Dr. Wright's book is as full of such myths as the earlier. Indeed, it would appear that there is nothing trustworthy in our author's account of the novelists' aunts and uncles beyond the few dry biographical facts which old Alice Brontë gave to the Rev. J. B. Lusk in 1890.

The Reviewer and the Avenger.

When we come to the latest narrative in the book, which brings us nearly to the year 1850, the reader will suppose that

here, at least, we must reach solid ground. But it is not so. Everyone has heard how Hugh III. (the Giant) set out, shillelagh in hand, on what Dr. Wright calls "one of the strangest undertakings within the whole range of literary adventure," viz., to find and slay the *Quarterly* reviewer who had traduced his niece. The tale has found its way, I believe, into almost every newspaper in Great Britain, and will probably continue to be told as fact for many a long year to come. Yet I shall be able to show beyond all controversy that there is not a word of truth in the story. My suspicions were aroused by the inconsistencies and peculiarities of the narrative itself, and by Dr. Wright's admissions that he could never induce Hugh III. to acknowledge its truth, nor could the daughter of the gentleman to whom Hugh is alleged to have told it, and that it was unknown to some of Hugh's brothers and sisters. I resolved, therefore, to institute inquiries.

The story tells that Hugh III. called again and again at Murray's, and inquired for the reviewer; the publishers gave him no information, however, but, instead, tried to find out from him the name of the anonymous author of *Jane Eyre;* and, at last, seeing his truculent character, forbade him the house. A piquant anecdote such as this, I said to myself, relating to so famous a person as Charlotte Brontë, is sure to be treasured among the literary reminiscences of the firm of Murray. Accordingly I wrote to them on the subject. Mr. John Murray says in his reply that he is unable to believe a word of the story, and adds: "There is no record here of such a visit having taken place, and I never heard my father allude to it as a fact." Dr. Wright proceeds to tell us that when the Avenger was baffled at Murray's he went to Messrs. Smith, Elder & Co., and told them his errand; they received him civilly, and procured for him admission into the British

Museum reading-room, where he might perchance find out the name of the offending reviewer. Now every one knows that the relations between Charlotte Brontë and her publishers were of the most friendly character; they took the warmest interest in all that concerned her literary work, and they knew how deeply she had been hurt by the review in the *Quarterly*. If this extraordinary incident had taken place, then, it would have made a great impression. The member of the firm with whom Charlotte corresponded, and at whose house she visited, is fortunately yet with us, and could confirm the story if true. But, in reply to my inquiries, the firm write that they have "no recollection" of any such incident. Finally, Dr. Wright tells us that Hugh III. haunted the British Museum reading-room, and met there a rich old gentleman who several times invited him to his house, drank his health at dinner, examined his shillelagh, and so

forth. Now it so happens that an accurate and classified list is kept of all who are admitted to the reading-room of the British Museum. One of the officials has kindly made a careful search for me, and no Hugh Brontë visited the room as stated in Dr. Wright's history. The story is plainly apocryphal. Either Dr. Wright's informant or Hugh III. himself was romancing.

This external evidence will seem to most people sufficient. But in order that there may be left no pretext for resuscitating the tale, I propose next to test its statements by other facts known to us.

The *Quarterly* containing the savage attack upon the author of *Jane Eyre* was issued December 1848. The correspondence in Mr. Shorter's book makes it clear that, contrary to what has hitherto been believed, the authorship of the offending article did not long remain a secret; shortly after February 4, 1849, Charlotte knew that Miss Rigby was the reviewer.

The disclosure of this fact must have been as a bolt out of the blue to Dr. Wright; but he is not easily staggered, and he soon recovered himself. In the *Bookman* of December 1896 he explains how it all happened. By the second week in December the covert taunts of the surrounding peasantry, who, no doubt, were diligent readers of the *Quarterly*, had roused Hugh III. to undertake his mission of vengeance: "The Brontës never delayed, and Hugh must have reached Haworth before Christmas. Hugh's money and mission must certainly have come to an end before the close of January 1849."* Very well: we will take Dr. Wright's word for it, and will examine the tale accordingly.

Before Christmas, then, Hugh the Giant arrived at Haworth. Anne Brontë at this

* It is almost certain that Charlotte did not *see* the offending article till the beginning of February. (See *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 190.)

time was most seriously ill;* and on December 19 Emily Brontë died. It was a period of most poignant anguish, and the agony of it still throbs in brave Charlotte's letters. How is it, then, that not a word of all this occurs in Dr. Wright's detailed account of the visit? Is it possible that Hugh, who must have been in the house at the time of the death or the funeral, or both, can have said nothing of these sad circumstances to his Irish confidants, when he gives so many other unimportant and trivial details of his visit?

Hugh, we are told, "reached the vicarage on a Sunday, when all except Martha, the old servant, were at Church." Martha "rated him soundly for journeying on the Sabbath," but allowed him to remain till the family returned. It will be seen at once that this is quite irrecon-

* This appears from several of Charlotte's letters—among others those dated January 10 (Mrs. Gaskell's *Life*, p. 284) and January 2 and 18 (*Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, pp. 176 and 185).

cileable with the facts. Anne at this time was far gone in consumption, Charlotte was engaged in nursing her, and both sisters were prostrate with grief. Is it likely that they would be allowed on a Sunday in mid-winter to go and sit in a cold church?

When the family returned, we are told, "the girls gathered round him," and listened eagerly to his ghost stories! Apparently Dr. Wright imagined that all three sisters were alive and full of vivacity and spirit. Imagine the two girls listening eagerly to ghost stories at a time when Emily was either lying dead upstairs or had just been placed in her grave! These are minute points, perhaps, but I allude to them to show that there is not a finger's breadth in this narrative which does not crumble away at a touch.

Old Mr. Brontë and Charlotte, we are told, tried to dissuade Hugh III. from his purpose, "but gentle Anne sympathised

with him and wished him success." On his return, unsuccessful, "the gentle Anne received him with the warmest welcome, and talked of accompanying him to Ireland, which she spoke of as 'home.' At parting she threw her long slender arms round his neck and called him her 'noble uncle,'" (p. 291). Is this credible? Remember Hugh's purpose was *murder*: "The scoundrel who had spoken of his niece as if she were a strumpet must die. Hugh's oath was pledged, and he meant to perform it" (p. 282). Before leaving Ireland we are told, he made his will, apparently thinking that either he might be slain in making his assault or fall into the hangman's hands afterwards. Is it conceivable that the dying Anne, deeply religious as we know her to have been, would have encouraged an ignorant peasant to the commission of a crime which would have brought him to the gallows? I venture to think there is not one of my readers

who will not cry out upon this story, Impossible!

It is remarkable, too, that Hugh should have known his niece to be the author of *Jane Eyre* at a time when Charlotte was most anxious to keep it a profound secret. Dr. Wright says, indeed, that she sent presentation copies of all her works to her Irish relatives, and that he possesses some of these himself. He does not tell us what proof he has that the copies in his possession once belonged to the Irish Brontës, and he acknowledges that the volumes of *Jane Eyre* cannot be traced. I am afraid it will need evidence much stronger than is yet forthcoming to convince us that Charlotte thus gave away her secret. Ten months after the alleged mission of vengeance we find her writing to Mr. Williams: "I earnestly desire to preserve my incognito."* Yet Dr. Wright wishes us to believe that from the first the name

* See *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 354.

of the author of *Jane Eyre* had been known not only to the people of the manse at Ballynaskeagh, but to all the surrounding peasantry! Even could this be proved, the mission of vengeance would still remain incredible. Charlotte would have moved heaven and earth to prevent it. It would have been intolerable to her that the secret which had exercised all the newspaper editors in Great Britain should first be disclosed in the paragraphs of police intelligence. Yet if she had allowed a wild Irishman to go to London to vindicate her honour with his shillelagh, that would have been the inevitable result.

Again, if this story be true, old Mr. Brontë knew in December 1848 that Hugh both possessed a copy of *Jane Eyre* and was aware who was its author. That this was not so I shall now prove from Dr. Wright's own pen. There is a volume in existence of a cheap edition of *Jane Eyre*

with the following inscription in Mr. Brontë's own handwriting:

"To Mr. Hugh Brontë, Ballynaskeagh, near Rathfisland, Ireland,—This is the first work published by my daughter under the fictitious name of 'Currer Bell,' which is the usual way at first of authors, but her real name is everywhere known. She sold the copyright of this and her other two works for fifteen hundred pounds, so that she has to pay for the books she gets the same as others. Her other books are in six volumes, and would cost nearly four pounds. This was formerly in three volumes. In two years hence, when all shall be published in a cheaper form, if all be well, I may send them. You can let my brothers and sisters read this.

"P. BRONTË, A.B.,

"Incumbent of Haworth, near Keighley.

"*January* 20, 1853."

Dr. Wright's own comment upon this

inscription is: "It assumes that the uncles and aunts of the novelists had never seen the first edition of their nieces' works." But how could old Mr. Brontë have believed in 1855 that Hugh knew nothing of Charlotte's writings, if in 1849 he had tried to dissuade him from executing vengeance on the reviewer who had traduced the author of *Jane Eyre*? Can any one explain this puzzle? Further, it can now be proved from Charlotte's own letters that ten months after Hugh's alleged mission of vengeance old Mr. Brontë *did not even know of the offending reviewer's existence*. In August 1849 Charlotte writes to Mr. W. S. Williams: "The *Quarterly* I kept to myself. It would have worried papa."*

It is shaving the dead perhaps to pursue the subject further, but I cannot forbear to point out one more of the intrinsic absurdities of the tale. The incumbent of Haworth we are told, endeavoured, by

* *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 347.

showing Hugh the sights of Yorkshire, to draw his mind from its fierce intents. "He was careful that Hugh's entertainment should be to his taste, and he took him to see a prize-fight." Could anything be more blankly incredible? Even if he had been the most flinty hearted wretch then living, would this aged evangelical clergyman have allowed himself to be seen feasting his eyes on a pugilistic encounter almost before his daughter Emily was cold in her grave? Yet this story has been gravely accepted as history by half the literary critics of this country!

I think one is now entitled to ask Dr. Wright to explain the genesis of this curious narrative. It is not given as a vague myth, but as a detailed history. We are told exactly how the hero's shillelagh was fashioned for the adventure, that he embarked at Warrenpoint and landed at Liverpool, that the name of the vessel in which he crossed was

the *Sea Nymph* that the position of his lodgings at Haworth was near the river and so forth. I am informed on the best authority that the Brontës of County Down deny the whole story; and Mrs. Heslip, the niece of Hugh III. and Miss Shannon,* his grand-niece, both assert that at the date when their uncle was in England the Brontë novels had neither been written nor thought of. Dr. Wright must have known these facts. What justification can he plead for publishing the story without giving the slightest hint that it was disputed? All who are interested in literature will wait with curiosity for Dr. Wright's answer. In any case it is clearly proved that Hugh III.'s adventures are apocryphal, and if we cannot trust our author's investigations when they relate to events alleged to have

* Miss Shannon writes me: "Until we saw the account of Hugh's visit to thrash the reviewer we never heard of it, nor do we believe it."

happened only half a century since, what credit can we give to his two-hundred-year-old records?

The Asserted Irish Origin of the Brontë Novels.

That Dr. Wright himself may unwittingly have helped the growth of these myths is rendered possible by an extraordinary statement which he makes in the second chapter of his book. He tells us that when he was a boy his old schoolmaster, the Rev. Mr. McAllister, used to dictate to him some of Hugh II.'s tales, as well as the story of his life, as themes for composition; and then Dr. Wright proceeds:

"It thus happens that I wrote screeds of the Brontë novels before a line of them had been penned at Haworth. . . . I read the Brontë novels with the feeling that I had

already known what was coming, and I was chiefly interested in the wording and skilful manipulation of details" (p. 8). He repeats the assertion on p. 139: "The stories are *all* Brontë stories, an echo of the thrilling narratives related by old Hugh." There cannot be a doubt that Dr. Wright's memory is playing strange pranks with him here. If we accepted the history contained in his book as true, it would show that *Wuthering Heights* was based on facts, but it would not account for a single line of the other novels. What possible excuse, then, can Dr. Wright give for saying, as he plainly does in the above passage, that all the novels of Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë were founded either on Hugh II.'s life or his stories? It will not do to take refuge in the latter. *Wuthering Heights* is a work of pure imagination, and it is easy to shape a myth so as to resemble it. But the stories in the other books deal with places and

conditions which were altogether beyond the horizon of Hugh II.'s experiences. *Jane Eyre* treats of life in a girl's charity school, and then of the history of an English governess. The plots of *Villette* and *The Professor* are both laid in Belgian schools. The characters in *Shirley* are Yorkshire girls, Yorkshire parsons, and Yorkshire manufacturers. *Agnes Grey* records the experiences and trials of a private governess in various families. *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* deals with the history of a besotted drunkard, and Charlotte tells us distinctly that it was founded minutely on observation. Indeed, the whole of the Brontë novels, with the exception of *Wuthering Heights*, are the result of the play of a creative imagination on personal experiences, and those who are familiar with both the lives of the Brontës and their novels can identify almost every character of importance in them. It is therefore utterly impossible that Dr.

Wright could have known what was coming as he read the Brontë novels for the first time, and he may be challenged to point out any plot in Charlotte's or Anne's books which could by any possibility have been borrowed from the stories of an Irish peasant in Hugh's circumstances.

And the claim that *Wuthering Heights* is based upon this Hugh's history is as ridiculous as that the other novels are founded upon his stories. The improbabilities, the anachronisms, the inconsistencies of that history, as told by Dr. Wright, I have already exposed. I have shown that not a scrap of evidence worthy the name is adduced in its favour; and I have recalled the fact that the near relations of Hugh II. were confessedly ignorant of the story which yet we are led to believe was ever on his lips. But, even if the evidence were as strong as it is weak, we should still have to reject Dr. Wright's theory. The truth-loving Charlotte's

account of the matter must necessarily be final. She might blamelessly have kept silence about the origin of *Wuthering Heights*, but she would never have deliberately misled us; and she tells us distinctly in her preface to her sister's book, that the materials of *Wuthering Heights* were gathered in Yorkshire. Speaking of Emily's aloofness from all her neighbours, she says: "Yet she knew them; knew their ways, their language, their family histories; she could hear of them with interest, and talk of them with detail, minute, graphic and accurate; but *with* them she rarely exchanged a word. Hence it ensued that what her mind had gathered of the real concerning them was too exclusively confined to those tragic and terrible traits of which, in listening to the secret annals of every rude vicinage, the memory is sometimes compelled to receive the impress. Her imagination, which was a spirit more sombre than sunny, more

powerful than sportive, *found in such traits material whence it wrought creations like Heathcliffe, like Earnshaw, like Catherine.*" To all who really know Charlotte's character, this is conclusive and final. Had both plot and characters been derived from the history of an ancestor, these words would never have been written.

Prunty *v.* Brontë.

Enough has now been said to show that Dr. Wright's book is not history but myth, and substantially nothing else but myth. But his errors have been the means of eliciting light upon at least one interesting question—that of the name of the Irish ancestors of the novelists. Before the publication of *The Brontës in Ireland* it was conjectured that the novelists' father had assumed his high-sounding cognomen about the time (1799) when the dukedom

of Brontë was conferred upon Nelson; it was asserted that Brontë was not an Irish name, and Mr. Birrell and others suggested that the novelists were descended from Irish Pruntys. Dr. Wright in his book set himself to prove that the name had always been "Brontë" and nothing else, and in order to do this he used what evidence was in his favour and entirely omitted all that told against his theory. The baptismal register of Patrick Brontë and his brothers—extending between the years 1779 and 1791—was discovered by the Rev. H. W. Lett, and here the surname is found as Brunty and Bruntee. Dr. Wright quotes all the Christian-names from this register (p. 159), *but never gives a hint that the surname is not Brontë.** Similarly he tells us that he possesses photographs of Patrick Brontë's matriculation and graduation signatures,

* My references throughout are to Dr. Wright's first edition.

and of the latter (1806) he gives a facsimile —"Patrick Bronte," without the diæresis— *but he gives us not a hint that at matriculation* (1802) *the name is entered "Patrick Branty."* Throughout his book he never for a moment suggests that the name had been written other than as at present, and yet the evidence then in his possession revealed prior to 1803 the names Brunty, Bruntee and Branty, and not a single Brontë. While thus suppressing the facts that told against him, he asserts in his preface (p. vi.) that the discovery of the baptismal register "disposes for ever of the baseless assertion that the family was called 'Prunty' in Ireland." This is how the matter was left when Dr. Wright first issued his book.

But the publication of *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle* brought to light the facts which Dr. Wright had ignored. Mr. Shorter revealed the surnames as written in the baptismal register and in the list of ad-

missions of St. John's College, Cambridge, and further pointed out that the name took several forms prior to 1799, but never that of Brontë. Since these facts were made known Dr. Wright, to do him justice, has disclosed the further evidence which has come under his notice, and very valuable it is. He has received from the Rev. J. B. Lusk—to whom belongs the credit of recovering them—certain old school-books of the Brontës. On one of these on different pages are found the following inscriptions: "Patrick Pruty's book, bought in the year 1795"; p. 240, "Patrick Prunty his book"; p. 249, "Patrick Prunty his book and pen." On pp. 232 and 250 the name "Brunty" appears; and on pp. 66 and 240 "Walsh Bronte." In another book is found the inscription, "Hugh Bronte. His book in the year 1803." Dr. Wright has also picked up a New Testament which he declares, but without giving proof, belonged to the wife of Hugh II., the

grandmother of the novelists, and in this volume the name "Allie Bronte" is faintly decipherable.

If all the above evidence be carefully examined the following facts will seem to emerge, though I do not pretend that complete certainty can be arrived at. The peasant ancestors of the Brontës spelt by ear, so to speak, and were accustomed to confuse P and B. Patrick, when a youth of eighteen years of age with literary ambitions, knew that the right spelling was Prunty, and wrote it accordingly—for "Pruty" is evidently a mere slip. In 1802, when Patrick entered at St. John's College, Cambridge, the plebeian Prunty began to undergo a transformation and became Branty. In 1803, and again in 1806, we find Bronte, but without the diæresis. A little later and it assumes the shape now so familiar to all admirers of English literature. As to the adoption of the modern form of the name by the Irish

relations we must remember that the Rev. Patrick Brontë was in life-long correspondence with his brethren of County Down, and doubtless, as Mr. Shorter suggests, "with a true Celtic sense of the picturesqueness of the thing they seized upon the more attractive surname." The inscription, "Walsh Bronte," in the schoolbook is accounted for when we remember that Welsh was nine years younger than Hugh, and probably would not come into possession of Hugh's book till the change of name was in progress. The inscription, "Allie Bronte," presents no difficulties; if it really belonged to the mother of Patrick Brontë and not to his sister—of which at present there is no proof—she would, of course, take to spelling her name as did her children, and especially as did that kind son in England who contributed so liberally to her support. If the original name had been Brontë we may be sure Patrick, the young and ambitious school-

master of County Down, would never have written himself plain Patrick Prunty, nor would Allie have registered her children as Bruntys. It is true that we cannot yet get beyond exceedingly probable conjecture, but there is at least an end of Dr. Wright's too confident assertion that the name was never in Ireland called Prunty.*

Sources of Error.

Before closing my notice of Dr. Wright's work two interesting questions suggest themselves. The first is: How did Dr. Wright come to put together such a book? It is a question I cannot fully answer,

* It is scarcely necessary to notice the statement of Frank Prunty, the boatman on Lough Erne, who "believes" that the name was spelt "Brontë" in the south. There is no evidence of any such spelling previous to the conferring of Nelson's dukedom, and there is clear evidence that it was then spelt "Prunty" and "Brunty." The change from the plebeian to the aristocratic form can be readily accounted for, but not so the converse change.

but I will endeavour in some measure to assist the puzzled reader.

One source, possibly, of this strange volume is indicated in our author's second chapter. It may be partly founded upon the tittle-tattle of a few Presbyterian manses in County Down thirty or forty years ago, unwittingly distorted, perhaps, by the lapse of time since. All Dr. Wright's geese are swans, and accordingly the Rev. Mr. McAllister of Finard, the Rev. Mr. McKee of Ballynaskeagh, and the rest are marvels of erudition and literary acumen. Mr. McKee in particular is represented as an intellectual giant as well as a moral paragon.* He may have seemed so to Dr. Wright when a boy, but of his critical faculty we are enabled to judge for ourselves by an anecdote that our author

* "It was a common saying of the pupils that, had he lived with more favourable surroundings, he would have enriched the world with thoughts as brilliant as Carlyle's, but without Carlyle's bile" (*Brontës in Ireland*, p. 9).

has preserved. When a copy of *Jane Eyre* was brought to Mr. McKee by Hugh III., the uncle of the novelists, his criticism, after reading it, was this: "The child, Jane Eyre, is your father in petticoats, and Mrs. Reed is the wicked uncle by the Boyne"! A more ridiculous comparison it is impossible to imagine. The melodramatic villain Welsh—a murderer and embezzler—bears not the slightest resemblance to the narrow, hard, evangelical lady whose severity is so distressing to little Jane; and the history of the boy stolen from home and suffering for ten years the physical torments and brutalities of his father's enemy, is totally unlike the history of the little orphan girl at Gateshead Hall and Lowood School. But this anecdote gives us a possible key to some of the myths. One who could see resemblances between Welsh and Mrs. Reed, Hugh II. and Jane Eyre, could see resemblances at will everywhere. Doubtless, as

the fame of the Brontës grew, the ministers became proud of their knowledge of the Brontë ancestry, and gradually, from tracing imaginary resemblances, such as those just given, they may have proceeded unconsciously to colour "old Hugh's yarns," as Mr. McKee calls them, with what they read in *Wuthering Heights.*

Another source of error is suggested by Mr. Shorter in his recent book. "Dr. Wright," he says, "probably made his inquiries with the stories of Emily and Charlotte well in his mind. He sought for similar traditions, and the quick-witted peasantry gave him all that he wanted. They served up and embellished the current traditions of the neighbourhood for his benefit, as the peasantry do everywhere for folk-lore enthusiasts." This theory may account, perhaps, for the genesis of some of the myths, but I fear it will not carry us far.

The chief explanation of Dr. Wright's

errors is to be found, doubtless, in his strange conceptions of what constitutes evidence and of what is legitimate in the manipulation of facts. Our author is first possessed by an idea, and then he finds in every testimony he comes across "confirmation strong as Holy Writ," even when it is testimony distinctly unfavourable. Several instances of this I have already had occasion to notice; let me strengthen them by other examples.

In the preface, in which he expresses indebtedness to those who assisted him in his work, Dr. Wright devotes a paragraph to Miss Nussey, the life-long and intimate friend of Charlotte Brontë, and classes her among the ladies who have "helped" him. And in the body of the book, where he identifies the characters of *Wuthering Heights* with his mythical personages, he prefaces his observations with these words: "Miss Nussey . . . . believes firmly that the girls caught their inspiration from their

father, and that Emily got not only her inspiration but most of her facts from her father's narratives." The effect of all this upon the reader is the conviction—which carries immense weight—that Miss Nussey in some way helped Dr. Wright with his work and is a convert to his theories. In point of fact, however, nothing in this volume originated with Miss Nussey, and she entirely discredits his stories, "firmly believing them to be mythical."*

In replying in the *Bookman* of December 1896 to critics who discredited the story of Hugh's mission of vengeance, Dr. Wright wrote as follows:

"Mrs. Heslip, a daughter of Sara Brontë, Patrick's sister, first cousin to Charlotte, writes me that she used to work for her uncle Hugh, and remembers him coming to England."

In a similar strain, and at greater length, he quotes Miss Maggie Shannon, of Bally-

* *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle*, p. 158.

naskeagh, first premising that she has "great stores of information" about the Brontës. After quoting these two ladies, he proudly claims to have demolished his critics. The guileless readers of the *Bookman*, of course, must have concluded that these two relatives believed in the adventure. Which of them would guess that both entirely discredit it, and that Mrs. Heslip had told Dr. Wright to his face what she thought of his book?* Surely Dr. Wright himself will see on reflection that a suppression of this kind is quite indefensible; he will not seriously contend that he may quote two witnesses as favourable *when it is known that neither of them believes a word of his story*. Yet this lame defence is apparently all he has to offer.

And Dr. Wright is apt to treat documents as he treats witnesses. In the *Bookman* of December 1896 he quotes

* *Sketch*, February 14, 1897.

from the Rev. J. B. Lusk's notes the following particulars which Alice gave concerning James' visit to England: "Charlotte asked particularly about the Knock Hill and Lough Neagh . . . . Ann the youngest wanted to come home with Jamie. He thought it queer that she called Ireland home," &c. But in his book these facts are transferred from Jamie to Hugh. There it is *Hugh* whom Charlotte questions about the Knock Hill; it is *Hugh* whom Anne proposes to accompany to Ireland, and to whom she speaks of Ireland as home (p. 291). By the use of such methods as these it is not surprising that Dr. Wright is able to "prove" all sorts of things that never happened.

The Brontës in Ireland and the Critics.

The other question which is likely to be aroused in the minds of my readers is, How

came such a work to run successfully the gauntlet of the press? It is certainly a curious phenomenon that a book with contradictions and absurdities written large on every page should have been received everywhere with applause, especially when it is remembered that among those who reviewed *The Brontës in Ireland* were brilliant writers whose names are everywhere held in honour.* A partial explanation may be found if my suggestion be accepted that the book was hastily read as one might read a novel. But it is an unpleasant illustration of the way in which editors perform their duties if a work of this kind was assigned to men of facile pens and uncritical minds who had no peculiar knowledge of Brontë subjects.

And even if this explanation be accepted it is not satisfactory. I have no hesitation

* In the advertisement of the third edition the favourable opinions of no less than thirty-one reviewers are quoted, and the praises of many of them are quite dithyrambic in their fervour.

in asserting that the literary merits of Dr. Wright's book are but little superior to its historical qualities. I have already quoted a specimen of the melodramatic style in Hugh III.'s defiance of the devil. Let me give another from an account of a pugilistic encounter between Welsh Brontë and a neighbour, fought, I suppose, the best part of a hundred years ago, and of which Dr. Wright can only have received an oral account: "A few awful moments followed. The spectators held their breath and some fainted, others covered their eyes with their hands or averted their faces. Terrific crushing and crashing blows resounded all over the field, and when the blows ceased to resound Sam Clarke was lying a motionless heap in the ring . . . . No word above a whisper had been heard during the long afternoon! . . . . All were agreed as to the closing scene. During the last few seconds the fight became so fierce and furious that

the blood of the spectators ran cold. Nothing like it for wild fury and Titanic ferocity had ever been witnessed by the crowd, and no such battle has ever before or since been fought in County Down." I can assure any one who has not read Dr. Wright's work that the pabulum with which he presents his readers is rich with such plums as these. One enthusiastic critic says, "There is a real Homeric ring in the book," and I can only suppose he is alluding to the occurrence of such strained and exaggerated passages as the above. If this is Homeric, then Homer not only nods but snores.

But I must not omit to call attention to our author in his softer moments. We have also the popular novelette style. Let me select as an instance the description of Alice McClory, the heroine of the apocryphal elopement with Hugh the Paragon :

"Her hair, which hung in a profusion

of ringlets round her shoulders, was luminous gold; her forehead was Parian marble; her evenly set teeth were lustrous pearls; and the roses of health glowed on her cheeks. She had the long dark brown eyelashes that in Ireland so often accompany golden hair, and her deep hazel eyes had a violet tint and melting expression," &c. &c.

Some of our modern critics are evidently much impressed to find such purple patches in Dr. Wright's pages. If the other kind is Homeric, I suppose it will be maintained that this has Tennyson's mother-of-pearl shimmer or is dipped in the rainbow hues of Shelley!

I must draw attention, too, to another characteristic of the book—the lack of all sense of humour which it evinces. I have already alluded to one instance of this—the mock heroic speech addressed by the villain Welsh *to an infant of five.* Another very remarkable specimen occurs in

Chapter XV. Dr. Wright first describes how the neighbours crowded into the Paragon's cottage to get within hearing of his marvellous and fascinating stories; and then occurs the following: "Patrick, *then a baby*, was lying on the heap of seeds from which the fire was fed, with his eyes fixed on his father, *listening, like the rest, in breathless silence.*"

I should have imagined the very first clause in the preface to the book would have damped the reviewer's ardour. It runs thus:

"I trust it is unnecessary to say that I disclaim all responsibility for the Brontë acts, opinions and sentiments recorded in this book. As no one living could lay claim to Brontë genius, even in its less cultured condition, no one should be held responsible for the eccentricities of that genius."

Could anything be more inane? How could Dr. Wright be held responsible for

the opinions of persons long dead, even if there was anything to be ashamed of in those opinions, which there is not? And what sanity is there in suggesting that these Irish peasants—about whom, in point of fact, very little is known—had genius such as no living person can lay claim to? Here was an inscription over the very threshold of Dr. Wright's work, saying plainly to any one in search of sense and balance: "Abandon hope all ye who enter here." But the critics were undeterred, and their enthusiasm seems to have waxed warmer and warmer as they proceeded. It would almost seem as if a temporary madness had befallen the literary world.

If this extraordinary book has the effect of making editors more cautious and critics more critical, it will not have been written in vain. But it is difficult to see what other object it can serve. Seeing how entirely its stories have been disproved, even when they relate to comparatively

recent times we certainly cannot treat any single page of it as trustworthy. True, in the last chapter its author leaves the recording of myths and sets about propounding a theory. He argues that the famous *Quarterly* article, though written by Lady Eastlake owed all its offensiveness to the interpolations of Lockhart, its editor. But this is as exploded as the rest of the book. All who are qualified to judge are now convinced that the article was written throughout by Lady Eastlake, and Mr. Andrew Lang, whom Dr. Wright quotes as sharing his opinion has now withdrawn his support. But what then, are Brontë students indebted to the author of *The Brontës in* [illegible]? His volume gives us, indeed, the trivial and somewhat rambling statements of poor old Alice Brontë, and a copy (mutilated) of the baptismal register of Patrick Brontë's brothers and sisters; but the former we owe to the Rev. J. B. Lusk and the latter to the Rev. H. W.

Lett. If Dr. Wright has himself given us any material fact about the Brontës which was before unknown, let him point it out; and I, when convinced, shall be duly grateful. But as to his theory of an Irish origin for the Brontë novels, there is nothing of it left; and the genius of Emily Brontë remains as inscrutable as ever.

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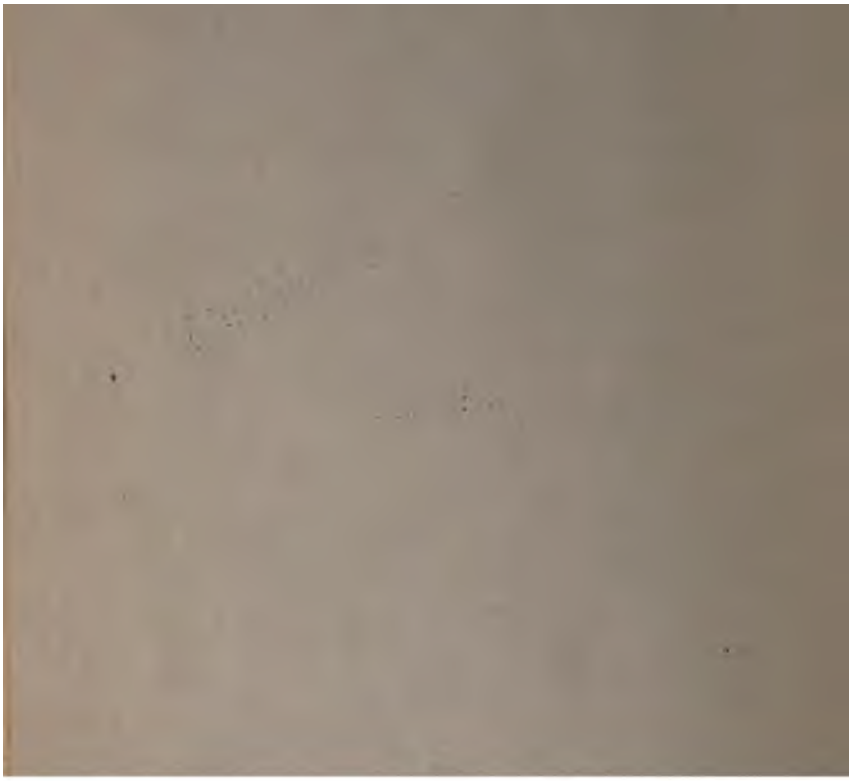

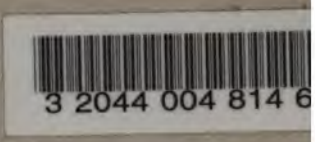

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